

Poetry Series

Cheryl L. DaytecYaňgot
- poems -

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Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot()

Cheryl L. Daytec-Yañgot is a Filipino human rights lawyer and activist. A member of an indigenous cultural community, she is also very passionate about the rights of indigenous peoples. This is reflected in her poetry.

She started writing at a very tender age, beginning with correspondences with missionaries and friends. She was the editor-in-chief of her high school paper. In college she was an editor of two campus papers and won various awards for literary works.

Named one of the Ten Outstanding Students of the Philippines in 1999 for exemplary community involvement, activism and academic performance, she continues to search for justice and social equity. She believes that poetry has an indispensable role in societal transformation which has become her obsession. Her poems often deal with injustice and oppression, love and passion, and what she calls 'the enigma in between.'

'Words, spoken loudly by the throng, can put down an oppressive status quo,' she says, as she encourages people to assert freedom of expression and use it to promote social change. She admires Jesus Christ, Karl Marx, Che Guevara and the Filipino revolutionary Andres Bonifacio 'who consecrated their lives for the freedom of human beings from the shackles of oppression.'

Many of her poems were published, mostly by progressive publications. Some were translated by other poets in Tagalog, the language of the Philippine majority culture.

A practising attorney, Cheryl Daytec-Yañgot is also an Associate Professor in St. Louis University, Baguio City, Philippines.

by: Elton Jun Veloria

A Day At The Morgue And After

They arrived bundled up in white cloths.
Or rather what used to be white cloths
now smeared with the hardened blood
of champions of righteousness,
and mud from the appalled earth
on which they, defenseless, slumped,
as breath was suctioned from their bodies
in a situation officially called
by the baptismal name
Encounter.
An innocuous name,
unable to spell guilt, □
claiming no victims – only heroes.

She saw the corpses laid out
In the morgue
So detached from having cradled
cadavers a thousand too many.
The face of one was too gruesome a sight
even for the blind;
Perforated, gaping
Like a mouth desperate to say something
But stuck in silence
Nonetheless saying the message
Better
Without the words.
She counted puncture wounds
Imminent to each other in the chest:
One, two, three, four, five, six, seven,
Eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen...
Overwhelmed by a sundry of ice pick work,
she concentrated on depth-
The caverns were so deep
Even buoyant thought could drown
As hers were sucked out by sorrow.
Loud colors suppliant for attention
Deep violet, light violet, reddish purple,
Yellowish purple, gangrenous yellow...
The doom of these deaths overshadowed all

she had seen. And she had seen many.
Someone in the room cried.
It could have been her soul;
Or one dead man's brother with yellow jacket
who smashed the concrete wall with his clenched fist.
Dense, angry grief cleaved to the air
Suppressing the stench of formaldehyde.

In the aftershock, her thought swam back
to the surface
Tired. Angry.
The killers' swivel chairs have been upgraded
for well-done punctures like charbroiled steak.
Truth once more has been chained;
Falsehood holds the whip.
And the bodies are rotting
In graves, restless from injustice
But not at all puzzled

For this is just routine.

(12 August 2006)

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

A Desaparecido's Farewell

My love, please do not wait up for me tonight
Or tomorrow – forgive me, I will not arrive
I am lying peaceful in an unmarked grave
In a tepid, dark place; please, my love, be brave.
Do not grieve: I have done all I needed to
Save for one weighty thing: oh, it haunts me so.

To my heart, they plunged a lance to halt my breath;
But ten more of me will emerge from my death.
Like glass chandelier launched by a livid sky
Into a thousand splinters, I will multiply.
My corroded flesh joined the barren, parched earth;
Droves of life-sustaining shrubs await their birth.

My blood is fertile peat for the grassroots' war
For liberty from hunger, to freedom's door.
My life is not my flesh; it's the robust force;
It gives intense light to Revolution's torch!
Its smolder unswerving-the masses wield it high!
While the steadfast grassroots stand, how could I die?

Promise no tears 'cause my death is not death: it's life.
Please celebrate my death; do not mourn, my dear wife.
From my grave - here, I hunger - beside you I stand;
I need to embrace you and caress your warm hand.
Please forgive me: there's just one thing I failed to do-
Oh, my love, why did I not say goodbye to you?

(I wrote this early morning of 2 December 2006. The day before, a fellow human rights lawyer and I met with two women whose husbands were victims of enforced disappearance. One of them talked with pain about the uncertainties felt by the disappeared's families. That night, I could not sleep thinking of how a desaparecido must be feeling during his/her last moments.)

□

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

A Full, Empty Crib (For Anthony's Grandfather)

In the corner a crib sits. Empty. Mute.

Twice today, he touched it with a
worshipping caress
Unconsciously, he fished deep for
a sleeping baby.

How do we fail to recall what we
don't remember?
How can't we dredge up what we don't forget?
Loved ones die, without dying at all
-there is always a resilient memory
that will repudiate melancholy, even the grave.
Like a baby's perpetual smell of powder and milk.
His first awkward step. The first time he clumsily
devour his cereals by himself. The first time he sleeps
dry through the long night

And more.

Sometimes, he asks, ' Why the blood of my blood,
the bone of my bone, the flesh of my flesh? '
And then he is consumed by guilt for the subliminal
prayer that it were some other baby who
had to be precipitately shipped over to the other shore
A baby -any baby- crossing the bar ahead of his forebears
is an affront to nature, an affront so monumental that it
is imprudence for the wisest philosopher to defend it.

It is not fair to keep remembering
a loved one in sorrow. We mourn Death.
But must we not honor Life as well no
matter how ephemeral it was?
Isn't the cemetery also called
Garden of Remembrance?
'My grandson's was a Life the world can celebrate
with memories more than enough
to fill a vacant crib and linger up to that
moment the world will breathe its last.'

He used to tell her daughter as a child:
'Once or twice, I asked for sunshine
I woke up as light rays crept to my room
God, after all, does listen.'

Inspired by his example,
she prays, prays, prays
her son will come back
from the grave
The prayer is her mantra

'Her son will not ever amble like a wobbling penguin
on my living room floor -the same floor his
grandmother had been obsessively burnishing
with red wax before he graced our lives
and became the focus of our thoughts and decisions.
Now the floor is red and shiny once more
His grandmother and I have gone back to rubbing
methyl salicylate on our arthritic arms and legs –
a necessary routine we had to abstain from when
his small form with a sensitive button nose
would cram the near-fictional space between us.
The two Chinese jars handed down by my grandmother
from her grandfather have recouped their exalted
realm in the staircase landing after years of exile in
the attic store room. I rest easy my children will
receive them from me in one piece.

'Yes, I wish I could go back to painfully missing salicylate.
Or walking on lackluster living room floor.
Or agonizing over what posterity will have to say
if I bequeath to them broken jar pieces crafted by
gifted hands during the age of the Jurassic Park,
not to mention the wrath of my ancestors' spirits
for decimating by neglect the proof of their erudite chic.
(How will everyone in the world tell from remnants of
porcelain or ceramic jars that human civilization
has been moving backward rather than forward?)

'That is far –or near- as wishes go. Reality bites.

'How do I tell my daughter that
Death is not an end
but the beginning of Life from
this world to the next?

'She will never embrace her son here again.
Someplace else. She will.

'As I will.'

He looks at the crib.
Not empty. Not mute.
For it bursts with a chubby form -
little hands outstretched
plainly expressing hunger for a cuddle
The musical gurgle of a baby permeates
every air space and drives away the dust,
even of desolation.

The grandfather weeps in utter elation
in honor of a brief, long life.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

A Mother's Valediction

My life is the picture of wretchedness
Like wilting flower in the wilderness
The spirit is dying, gone is the will
Its cup is void of hope, no one to fill
For myself, I do not dread the stinging cold
Stark poverty has rendered me so bold
Lifetime chances always passed over me
To create my fate, I was never free

My spirit sags from blisters of hunger
An aimless life like mine makes you suffer
A weary heart is always a dead weight
It bears indeed a resemblance to hate
Not even my embrace can keep you warm
From want and plague, I cannot halt the harm
I must send you where there is plenitude
Of freedom that's so lacking in my world

Strong mother's love forces these trembling hands
To hand you bundled to the eager arms
Of a woman whose heart is big enough
To save a child from a life rough and tough
I leave you but do not abandon you
Someday you will realize this is true
Long time and wide space can never erase
The poignant imprint of this last embrace

Tortured to think of what I have to miss
Your first word, your first step, even your first kiss
I am prepared to lose so you will gain
A world overflowing with love and grain

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Abrupt Exorcism

I am a five year old girl again. Suddenly,

the heavens snivel, their cold tears
descending as a deluge on earth. A
flash of light appears on the sky and
glints for a moment like a writing on
the wall as if a portent of more disaster
in line. The heavens wail with a clank
so strident, I have to cover my ears.
My two year-old brother is frightened
and he cleaves to me as if I could shelter
him from the wrath of the heavens when
I could not conquer the fear that seems

to shrive me of my spirit. My brothers
and I sit by the window overlooking the
entrance to our quiet home, impetuously
awaiting the appearance of Mama's petite
frame. Apprehensive, Ricky asks, "Do
you think Mama was swallowed by the
waters? Will she come home?" And I see
Mama's body being swept away by a surge
of rain to a place I have never seen and no
one will ever find. I shudder at the thought
and we pray to Jesus as Mama taught us.

As our hopes are about to be extinguished
as a candle blown by the wind, we see
Mama's figure approach the entrance to
our home, an umbrella in one hand
and her school work bag on the other

Abruptly, we forget we were so afraid.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Aftermath

Where tall trees used to stand to give shade to weary travelers, deep holes gape, as if taunting. An angry testimony to the typhoon's power to destroy life. Wreckages of human civilization are scattered on abandoned streets, or gliding through canals clogged by human rejects of miscellaneous colors and sizes. What would have been a plenteous yield is totally submerged in water. Not a head of cabbage is shown mercy to - a callous indifference to the sweat that nourished the wide land, and the mortgage that may soon snatch it. The children must skip a full academic year - education is a casualty, too. No more new jackets to defeat the fast arriving December winds. Warmth becomes luxury. What, save love, does not?

Somewhere families grieve over human corpses - drowned or hit or buried by falling debris. In the highlands, an eight year-old girl falls off a creek. A boy hears someone crying, "Mama! " Two days later, a girl's lifeless body would drift on a lowland river. My mother imagines that she drowned right after her fall.

"Truckloads of cheap canned sardines and packed noodles are on their way." So says the television broadcaster with a distinctly huge nose. Hungry mouths water, and innocent children rejoice at the piece of good news, amidst a somber environment. But in midstream, as in the past - for history is but a repeat of the plots with different actors and backdrops- the trucks will change course; sardines and noodles will be squirreled in depots of them who elevated audacity to the level of gut to swallow morsel meant for the damned. The air is thick with a cacophony of wails from the orphaned, the homeless, the wretched. Does it ring in the ears of bleeding hearts? Does it nudge the conscience of the blessed?

The fork-tongued leaders of the land promise recovery. Nobody who should listen hears them. For there they are - down on their knees, arms outstretched, agitated fingers caressing rosary beads, repeating chants, entreating the heavens for salvation.

At this point in its wake, the typhoon is tagged as the carnage mastermind. After all, a face or a name has to be responsible for the stench of human corpses, the harvest nipped in the bud, the homes whose relics now float on foul-smelling, murky rivers and creeks.

Nobody seems to see the large human hands behind.

Andres Bonifacio's Cry

The lights would not blink in the household of his class
Dreams were forbidden, slums plunged in deep shadow
The wide farmlands where staple corn and rice should grow
Were pools of blood from martyrs now and of time past
Choices confronted his soul: to live with ease as a lapdog
Or bear the torch where darkness had hidden the paths
But what is comfort when for a few? He scampered to the parks
He knocked on doors, and cast stark flames upon juvenile log

Relentless, as though trailing one true love, he cried
'Scathed by rape, she looks for us. Out from our safe den!
There is no love greater than love for one's Motherland,
More honorable than greatness, far more lofty than pride.'
The conscience of a nation was stirred and it arose
To break high prison gates bolted for three centuries
Undaunted by death, heroes gave up their last breaths
His blood spilled; beyond description, even by prose.

His agitated spirit upbraids us with a cry
'The walls are back and higher than what we tore down
The masters are much worse; they too were slaves at dawn
Is this the freedom for which comrades had to die?
The vanguards' empty spots await you or you fall
Rush! Take the places of brave forebears before
Bore into slavery, as in the days of yore
The times demand sacrifice; please, you heed the call.'

The voice is hoarse now; from our apathy we rise
Hunger's plea for salvation demands our urgent action
The people's purse was robbed again; we struggle on
Resist sharp thorns and swords; our freedom is the prize
For while we bite our tongues and cry our silent tears
We give the foes the whip they crack to make us slaves
Submission is the source of power tyranny craves
The streets beckon us! Now! Let us triumph over fears!

Antique Beads From Mother

Love expressed in stones
Of assorted colors
The sea-green jade
The blue chevron beads
The orange carnelian
The creamy ivory
In myriad shapes
Crafted by long ago hands
That knew the profile of beauty

How did the hands also know
Their art would travel through time
And strengthen the bond between
Mothers and daughters?

I clutch these beads
Ah, the splendor of feeling
The love of mothers
before mine
Smiling with delight
Knowing well that
Daughters after me
Will be blanketed by this warmth.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Appeal To A Dying Child

Do not go there, my child; your train must not arrive
Nature has intended that mine should come ahead
Come back, my child, come back, your thick baggage unpack
You must work on the seams begun with your fine dreams
Do not follow that light; it lures you to the night
The day for you is high - my time is what draws nigh
Nature's clear calendar shows youth's gaits are still far
From the terminal line while old age sips its wine

Resist that bright light's pull; your pages are not full
The gaps implore your hand to write your life upon
Each space as mine is filled, extra pages added
I will not fill up more. Respite waits over shore
The echoes on the wall still answer to your call
Every task must be done before the day is gone
Let me go in your place. Dance gaily through the years
Have children, watch them grow; your wisdom they must know

An untraversed road calls for the weight of footfalls
Unopened doors abound praying they will be found
Hope's energy is bare! It hankers for your dare
Should you take that low road, grief will compound its load
If your tired flesh needs rest, seek refuge in my crest
Lay your head on my lap, draw strength from a good nap
Then rise up. Tread again the path of the living
Do not usurp my hour. Your wine is not yet sour

To nature it's slander for youth to persevere
Against age in a race to get first to the grave
Youth belongs to the day where doors lead to the way
To worlds yet unexplored, to quests yet unresolved
It is not time to leave the comfort of your crib
Stay away from the grave. Resist it! Please be brave
Here and now, we both are; between us, time so far
You're in early March's light; I'm in November's night

But could it be that we are in proximity?
I smell my aging bone; I hear your dying moan
But why should a mother bury the cadaver

Of her child, her womb's fruit? What scourge could be as brute?
I will not dig your grave! It's mine you'll carve like cave
It's you who must mourn deep! At my death, you will weep
If one of us must go, that one cannot be you
Parents should not remorse over a dear child's corpse.

(for Aunty Glee; September 2001)

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Babloo's Song

I am weary from having seen too much
Of what I have already seen
Shovels and trucks stripping away the remaining earth
On the lands of my people,
And of kith and kin in other corners of the planet
The evil of the thunder from bombs
Shredding dreams into fragments of themselves
The hunger that pushed babies from cribs
To the rocky battlefields
The rapes that drove my sisters and mothers
To strip their clothes and unleash the rage
Killing their souls

I maroon my tired body in a soft bed
Willing for sleep, like petals on a flower
Undisturbed by frost or thorns
And I am so far away from home
I stare at the darkness, my only friend at night
The scent of Baguio pine penetrates my nose
From somewhere a band of crickets cheep

For a moment, I forget
The repulsive reek of death
The probing wails of hunger
I stop chasing the currents of violence
I stop twirling the wheels of resistance
I stop disentangling the knots in the laws
I stop solving the riddles in my people's fate

I look for beauty in the dark
It comes to me
In the shape of a crescent moon
Struggling for its full shape
Peeping shyly through the flimsy curtain
I follow its dream and it leads me
To the coming days
When I will sojourn back to your lap
And feel the warmth of the cotton sari
That covers your sweet, lithe body

I long to run my fingers through your smooth hair
Embrace you, kiss you and pause only
To listen to the patter of tiny feet on the floor
(Did the baby ask about me today?)

All the madness
Fades into nothingness
When you invade the pith of my thoughts

I long for my wings to grow
I cannot wait
To take that plane ride
Back home.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Banao

I had been coming here
In the summers of my childhood
The birds were perched high up the trees
straddling thin twigs
making sounds like the chime of bells
on a warm, indolent afternoon
The wild berries felt smooth
between my thumb and forefinger
tasting much sweeter in my tongue
than the expectant imagination

The tall trees were happy hosts
to lichens and rice orchids
beyond the avaricious reach
of the long arm of commerce
The pelting summer rain,
said the old woman by the roadside,
always brought new life to the ferns

I am here again
But this is not where I had been before
The pointers to the clear beauty of the sky
were claimed by chainsaws
that would not stop working
leaving behind rotting stumps
The bird's songs lost melody
as a footnote to the tragedy
delivered by greed
The orchids have gone to the laboratories
and now painted with colors
outside of their genetic history
The blue berries are now a legend in folk tales

Alas, I stand here with happy memories
this violated place sadly cannot affirm.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Beauty Before Death

Trees dance with colors like discotheque lights
through mists of white descending from the heavens
The light about to travel to another world hesitates,
begs for more time to kiss the vivid autumn shades
like a thirsty traveler who cannot drink enough from
the spring of sweet water in the heart of the desert
But it must go and its farewell walk alters the landscape
Into another dazzling form that holds my gaze
There is an orange fire in the sky, that seems to herald
A gaiety of every form blessed with magnificence
But tomorrow, the leaves cleaving to the proud twigs
Will tumble stupefied on expectant dull earth
Multihued petals will dropp down on a pile of decay
In every corner frozen branches and twigs will cling
To the trunks like the near-dead rejecting the grave
Trees will stand like ghosts too unhappy to haunt

For now let me stay mesmerized by the sight before me
With Mont Le Blanc ahead and Lake Geneva behind
Let me forget that this soul-entrancing beauty
Is a flamboyant prelude to the colors' sad demise.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Beyond Borders

With a pugnacious tremor, a quaint
emotion stirs to convict the tangled
mind that took a trip to depths unknown
A vision of hell dashes across the road to
be crushed to pieces, its remnants buried
in the farthest crevasse of conscience.

Whispers of forevermore and promise-filled
caresses punctuate the confusion
and aggravate the raging spirit

Pilfered moments on the telephone
are crammed with unfeigned passions
in defiance of the tenth
What technology purifies the spring of
the turbid quagmire of emotions?
What trajectory permits exodus from
the towering fortress of a destiny fabricated by
the church and the leviathans?

Vanquish the riot within the soul
Quell the tumult
Mend the shattered spirit
Peace, oh sacerdotal peace,
snatch the scepter from turbulence
Suffer the heart to love freely
Grant not a fleeting moment
Concede to even a brief eternity

But the stentorian chatter of children
in a world suddenly so strange yet
familiar purloins the hope.
The recurring cycle begins again
whilst fists clench.
The dam within breaks
in frail capitulation to

ordained defeat.

(For LA and GG)

Cheryl L. DaytecYaňgot

Bridge

You want to buy my necklace?
This comes from a far, far away place
It has intently traveled through time
From beyond memory can fathom
On narrow pathways, on cemented roads
Hunger cannot force my hands to sell
Even if I must eat dust

These colorful stones and beads
The dirty white animal bones
Look beyond, deep into them
This is not just some necklace
It is the happiness of the past
The sorrows of broken hearts
The hopes of a generation
For another one after it withers
The many cindered dreams
Of people cruelly betrayed by fate
Their enduring hope for mortality
Amid the blast of guns and cannons
Shattering their tranquility
Threatening their existence

This is the struggle of my ancestors
For the survival of their genes
And their beautiful history interrupted
But never vanquished by oppression

Their dream has become my dream
Their struggle has become my struggle

This necklace is my bridge to the past
It is my fragile link to the future

Struggle has no price
Even if I must eat dust.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Broken Promises

Gaily, I watched you in the front yard
The way your right hand held a hoe
and your left a tiny twig was poetry
Sweat flowed from your thick brows
as you stuck the branch to the ground
The baby in my belly somersaulted,
A cheering squad on its own, a sign
Of laughter in the long years ahead.
Or so I thought. Or wanted to believe

The rains stopped with your zest for life
You would sit on the rusted rooftop
Sad eyes glued to something ahead
Listless, you seemed anxious to go
Somewhere beyond my soft caresses
Somewhere beyond our small world

Knapsack on your back, you told me
you would return before the next rain
I watched your silhouette disappear
Swallowed by the empty dirt road
No backward glance after the last wave
So what? You'd keep track of the rain

I kept vigils waiting for your silhouette
To move towards my door, always open
The bougainvillea has been a frenzied
uprising of lush fuchsia for ten summers
But what a loveliness wasted, accursed!
A myth to its planter orphaned from his
creation - a cruel fate shared with a boy
Licking ice cream under its lavish shade

(Based on the story of a woman whose husband left her after World War II to work with the US navy. He never returned to her and their son who was born when he was overseas.)

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Call For The Next Dance

(for Harry)

How we used to dance together.

The dinner table would be set
With its lyrical sparkle of low light,
the candle would bid us:

Dance!

With mine, your body would move
in all directions,

weaving a poetry of motion

creating – unconsciously-

beautiful memories

that we would summon

with a smile,

not sorrow

when we could not dance

together anymore

Ah, how we loved to dance

In the morning

At noon

In the evening

How we loved to dance

When eternity was ours

in our moments of solitude together

or with a coterie of friends

or even total strangers,

we would dance

You would dance with a swarm of

lithe bodies or stiff ones

As long as I was there

I would watch as your feet pirouetted

as if controlled by some spirit of their own

You loved to dance

And before the next ball

I was snatched as I was about to hurl myself

to your waiting arms
after we were apart for a few days
the few that seemed frustratingly infinite
But the train came too fast, stopped long
(or short) enough to load me and absconded
before I could beg for a chance to say
to you
Goodbye
in the fashion we were accustomed
I wish we could have gone to the
Last Dance
which you skipped
because I could no longer go with you
Even if
You loved to dance

Lately, I would silently feel you
intuitively hankering for a dance
But you would not move your feet
Because I could not mine
Even if
You loved to dance

Because you must,
I let you grieve
I let you stop dancing
Even if
You loved to dance

The datebook of the past year is no longer there
in its place one desperate to remind you
time has moved forward with slow precision
Or have you not noticed?
The interregnum has been long
Even the Great Source of Wisdom says
There is a time for everything
A time to cry, a time to laugh
A time to hurt, a time to heal
Too, there must be, for you,
A time to forget, a time to remember
A time to bury a loved one,
A time to exhume the stirring memories

that say life does not end with one death,
Like how
You loved to dance

There is a ball
Why does the spirit in your feet slumber
Still?
You do not want to go
because I will not be there,
You think?
Even if
You loved to dance

Go to the bedroom
(Which is no longer ours but yours; let the
last of me vacate it so you can be whole)
Open the wardrobe
Retrieve your dancing pants
and your dancing shoes
Heed the call of the dance floor
It missed you for too long
This last time
I will be there
Before the clock strikes at midnight
Let me go
Because really
I have gone a long time
as your dance partner

Before I go, brace your ears
Let me stay
long enough to whisper to you

Dance again.

(10 July 2007)

*Harry is my California-based friend. His wife died unexpectedly. I wrote this a year after he was widowed when I and his other friends thought he was behaving like he was buried with his wife.

Carmen

Look at her hands with unvarnished nails
now rough from age and labor in her youth
They have embraced many babies in their cribs
and driven away the obnoxious goblins
that called on them at night and in solitude
Look at her mouth with unpainted lips
How many words have flowed from them
softly like the feel of cotton on bruised skin
restoring confidence and soothing nightmares?
Look at her eyes – they are tired and now read
through rounded spectacles about her children's
small victories which to her seem large as life
They have seen through the heart of every child
They cried the tears for every child's shattered dream
Her feet now set on brittle bones have walked
endless distances for a can of infant milk or a
dropp of cough syrup or a basic writing pad
Look at her ears unadorned with precious gems
They have listened to anguish, to exhilaration,
to lies, and to truths, to fiery temper, to half-meant apologies
Her skin now sags from age, her back is slightly hunched

Nonetheless.

She has had a full life. For she has given
a proud dimension to the word

Mother

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Caveat

Even if my body is dented from incessant
pummeling with the cold, glinting metal
fashioned by your harried technology,
I hear your idiosyncratic lark of greed
I vividly see you as you count the gold
abstracted from my womb, oblivious to
my harrowing pain escalating each trice
Satiated, you will abandon me unkempt,
defaced, mutilated, raped, half-dead.

For your sake, I must contain my wrath.

I cry, yes, for mirth, and my tears bring
life to a lotus about to give up the ghost
I puff for rapture and my breath blows
a fair maiden's hair away from her face
It scatters the seeds of the dying pine tree
to multiply its species, sprinkling sweet
perfume once more to your stinking world

But when I cry for pain beyond the pale
of my endurance tested for generations,
my desolate tears surge like a ferocious
cogency legating irreversible destruction
When I shiver from the vigor of your fists,
your palaces crumble and your pavements
crack creating a large crevasse in its wake
The Red Sea parted and the slaves fled
from bondage in a foreign land to liberty.
But your grounds will split to swallow you
and make you prisoners of your own idiocy

For your sake, I must not unbridle my wrath

But you betrayed me so many times
I endured all excruciating torture
How much more can I take?

My womb gives life.

My ineffable sorrow
takes it back.

Do not lay the dead at my feet.

☞ January 1998

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Caveat To The Unschooled

Be careful. I say, be very careful.
Doubt is an armor; trust is a weakness.

Do not just kiss the gleaming white paper
with your thumb marinated in violet fluid.
You do not know if it is your death sentence,
or a sturdy high fence to keep you off your land,
or an absorbent sponge to sop up your sanity
or a sell-out of your soul or your possession,
or a permanent pact with the Devil himself
Education has attached hideous horns to faces,
Even to those that look like cherubs or seraphs.

Those who trounce deceit need no paper
For a handshake can do as well as it does
Honesty is from the heart, not the schools.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Clandestine Affair

(For Fred as He Dreams on the Foot of the Alps)

He is mine in opaque spaces
unexplored by the public eye
Holding his hand, I see the
Alps twirl in rapturous delight
The perishing dark flirts with the
early morn as it kisses the dew
The wars are stilled by peace;
nightmares are soothed by dreams
The summer rain capitulates to
the sunshine; they resuscitate a
stiff edelweiss struggling from
the cold under the white snow
Life is beyond Death's reach

I am a hideous flower transformed
to beauty after its maiden kiss from
the handsomest bee in Eden
I know how Bathsheba felt under
David's admiring, eager stare
From my lover's lips freely stream
the words I implored from every
lover in my honeyed fantasies
Juliet, my heart capers as yours
did when Romeo professed his
love; it was too beautiful to end
Death had to give it eternal life
in the lovely legend it became
It is no myth from Shakespeare's
gossip mill; it is my reality when I,
within the confines of invisible
places, explore his naked body and
enter the farthest corner of his soul

Alas, in the parks, in the church,
in the presence of the crowd
I am a stranger to my lover
and he to me, it hurts so deep

I feel like the scorned kept woman
in the shoddy love triangle movies
But I am not his kept woman

Ecstatic in the absence of light
Heartbroken without the dark

I
 am
 a
 man.

-8 June 2007-

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Clarion Call

(to the People of Chittagong Hill Tracts,
Bangladesh)

We must be beyond our fears
For we have to overcome
In this time
When living is only
Survival

The bullets are raining
Wrath uproots sanity from a soil long ago parched
Death is its own seed
The graveyard is a less somber place
Than the homes breaking at the weight
Of tyranny

Like the glistening light of pine torches
in an abyss enslaved by darkness
courage must go where cowardice reigns
Warmth must invade the Arctic cold
There is an exit from Takla Makan
Somehow one dropp of rain will fall on the desert

An old woman looks out her window
She sees turbulence and evil
of every description
knock on her door
Her weeping summons us
Listen to the voice of the past
"Do not let the guns steal your memory
Not your future, your songs, your laughter,
Cut the chill of the night
Whose coldness stole the cricket's song."

Life must smother death
The river of blood must dry up
Let the music be heard
for it was long ago drowned
by cries of despair

The head count begins
Let us go for shame
must not steal our soul
We conquer the darkness that swallowed hope
Slash the terror from whose breasts silence sucks
Crush the silence that emboldened terror
that paralyzed the soul
Revive the soul for its coldness
Is sapping life
Sing a song of hope in places
Where nothing but the wails
Of orphans and widows are heard

We have to go.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Collective Noise

Alone,
To rid my soul of pain
I shouted
Till my voice was hoarse
No one heard me

And then I heard you
Each in your separate worlds
Shouting
In your pain
I joined you

Together we moaned
Our message was too loud
To be ignored

Now our voices are blending
Walls are trembling
Foundations are shaking

Under our
Collective noise

(Based on a talk delivered by Prof. Elifuraha Laltaika of Tanzania; 10 November 2008)

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Convergence

Our pains are woven from the same thread
We suffer -each in our worlds
The screams that come from our lungs
Are the same tortured lamentations
Our songs have the same lyrics
the same melody
I listen to your story
The face of your enemy blurs into the face of mine
As if there is no distinction

We cup our palms to catch our blood
Flowing into extinction
From the mountains hemorrhaging with greed
From the deep wounds of the land
Cradling our ancestors' bones
The lands that have owned us
Have fallen into the hands of our oppressors
They now own us
Their hands eager to obliterate
the footprints of our ancestors
on the rivers, on the lakes, on the springs

My world blurs into your world
Until they form one world
Our worlds separated by oceans and mountains
United by the same triumphs and tragedies
We chase separate but same roads
To generations thousands of years from now
Away from extinction

Even across the distance
We touch one another's hands
We share our warmth, our strength
Our combined power can not be blown away
like a formidable rock, resilient

In our triumphs, in our defeats,

We are one.

(Dedicated to the indigenous peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh)

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Conversation With Pain

You
hurt the
spirit that
inhabits my
body, like red
tide in the spring
of living water. You
force yourself through
every interstice, as tinting
color converts white to fuchsia
A thousand thorns pricking every
cell. I stop you with needles dripping
with poison. You surrender; then quickly
return with vengeance

Sleep is my friend, my
army against you. And even that you steal
with every violence. Why do you stick to
me like a horrid leech? You are like
the polluted air everywhere. You
are like the gatecrasher to a
party. Unwelcome like a
pariah but always
there.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Damnation

(The Day A Big-Time Thief Was Pardoned By a Bigger Thief)

On the streets, fury seeks wisdom
Injustice complains
Justice weeps in a corner
Silently
One got ten pies
And left ten to a hungry hundred
Inside ivory towers,
Dreams are being burned
Robberies are being schemed
Gold is being eaten by the epicurean
In the slums, old men cough
Children eat air and drink hunger
While mothers bake pan de sal
in their imagination
Our view deck trembles
We watched this
in another place
In another time
From a dim corner,
our destination is

Darkness.

(A Philippine President convicted for plunder was pardoned by his successor.
Apparently, she was setting a precedent? ! ?)

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Debate (Over Human Misery)

Day:

I made sure Sun peeped through the floating clouds all day
To make the berries sweet, help plants survive on clay
I sent warmth for the human clothes and blankets to dry
To be worn when your stark coldness conquers the sky
I sprinkled chlorophyll so that the harvest will be plenty
There will be an abundance, no one has to go hungry.
But-I presume- you know humans – few will have too much
Most of them will sadly have no share of such and such
Their modern civilization taught them well how to divide
But ancient equity has always been a lesson put aside

Night:

Do not monopolize the credit for the assured plenitude
I am so deeply affronted by your overbearing attitude
Redemptive human events come to pass when I take over
Weary backs are recharged for the morrow's arduous labor
The rich man's inspiration is how to get more wealthy
He exploits the energy of those he maintains in poverty
When you return in glory; you make the proletariat work
Respite I give them from the force of the hoe and the fork
To plant money on soil, for the rich man, during your time
This is shameless slavery; you tolerate such a crime.

Day:

The crime of which you speak is not schemed in the day
The dark you bury the world in lets the wicked have their way
Nefarious conspiracies are hatched under your watch
The wide holes in their crime, when you come, they put a patch
You think it's fabricated while over the world I rule
Because when I ease you out, the secrets come to the fore
You, on the other hand, obscure the hideous and the wrong
You curb illumination; you abate the vision of the throng
In my presence while I'm shimmering with brilliant light
Every malevolence is obvious; the wicked feel such fright!

Night:

I won't accede that you'll have the last word on this matter
You're blaming me that humanity has gone to the gutter
Evil is planned and done when the public eye is closed
Blindness seals the eyes- more when it is self-imposed
When people neglect to see, the wicked grab the chance
To sow injustices, to steal progress with a song-and-dance
Whether it's day or night, evil may be evident or latent
The people's will to diagnose it, upon it will depend
It was wrong for me to hurl at you a strong accusation
When since the beginning of time, I knew you all along

Day:

So what you are saying is that none of these is our fault
We never let them dream up ignominies in our vaults
Our anger and helplessness has pushed us to quarrel
For a moment we forgot we've always loved each other

Night:

Exactly, my friend, without shame, they used our time
To bloat the price of concrete, to steal the masses' last dime
To perpetrate their crimes, their iniquities and vices
None of these has our blessing; we are captive witnesses.

Day:

This is then the perfect time as any to remember
The ancient human culture we thought would be forever
People in the early times were not immersed in greed
They shared prosperity; exploitation was no creed

Night:

None of them, I remember, was either rich or poor
For equity was a virtue; disparity was no sore
Yes, we have been around since the very beginning
This batch of humans is here only for the time being

Day:

We will still be here when they are gone with their filth
If the new breed is the same, may God stop their birth
Before my duty ends today and you take over as lord
Have you not noticed, my friend, I have had the last word?

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Deferred Enlightenment

Several minutes after the appointed time
A second resembles an ominous eternity
The gates are still gaping, bolts clutching
at the last hair-thin straws of their patience
The piqued microwave grudgingly stands by
to rescue carefully prepared food from cold
Sympathetic walls glow with motley reflections
Of her; he sees them with a content inner eye
Even the monochromatic curtains pirouette
With an endless stream of happy memories
He savors each one, each one, till they run out
The gardening magazine in his hand thickens
And the mundane articles seduce his attention
till his anxiety vanishes in the colorful pictures
Of course, she will arrive when she will arrive
But the gentle breeze from the open window
diffuses a fraught whisper of rebuke, taunting,
counting the big mugs of coffee he consumed
counting the sticks of cigarette turned ashes
counting the times he glanced at the clock
the times he dialed a number beyond reach
the many times he was let down in days past
Love made him forget the rudiments of math
Slowly, the wide room becomes too narrow
for the sudden flood of his tormented thoughts
The walls mutate into a boring vision of white
Till they morph into a brilliance of grim reality
With the speed of a lover tailing his beloved
He scurries to the long-agape wide gates

And locks them.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Deja Vu

(On the day the Queen signed the 'anti-terror' law)

With her sun-kissed hands
callused from working the fields
She cups her young daughter's face
"Whisper your dreams
in the dead of a noisy night
when the crickets ululate
and the frogs croak in unison
The dark has grown wide ears.

The neighbor's young son isn't back yet
His mother hasn't taken off her veil
She has caressed bead after bead
while I scribble notes on a pad
The list has grown longer
I'm spent counting them who vanished
because they took the trajectory of truth
which is the path of the doomed.

Run! Run! Run into the light
Seek the cover of the day
which Darkness shed
Escape the dusk, escape the night
of the 70's which is back with that
paper they signed last night.
The shadows that were are once more

a strong presence in our midst."

☒ March 2007

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Double Talk

In the public plaza
Every child I meet
Looks like an orphan
Every mother looks
Like a widow
Every man looks
Stripped of pride
All naked, but for the
Threadbare clothing
On their emaciated bodies
All blind but for their eyes
That see their way to the plaza
All deaf but for the ears
That will hear promises
To lift them
from the pit of wretchedness

In the public plaza
You cry over the misery
Of the orphan
The widow
The man without self-esteem
You declare war
Against hunger
Against greed
The crack in your voice as
you condemn inequity
is so clear
it conquers doubts

You shower honey as you speak
With your unusually long hands,
You wave to the crowd
Of orphans, of widows
Of men stripped of dignity
Whose faces beam with hope
They have to hope.
What else comes free for them?

Soon, you will return
to the security of your edifice
Where you can be yourself again
I can see you – as in years past
I see you as you sit on the rocking chair
You unclasp your brassiere
And resume breastfeeding
The greed of the few

I heard you say, "I'm sorry" when
nothing was left to be said
You struggled against tears
Why did not the hair
At the back of my neck
Stand on their end
As they often do
When I am touched
By the hand of sincerity?

I walk away from the public plaza
Feeling heavier
than before I went
Wondering why I went there
In the first place
When I knew I would just witness
The funeral of truth again.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Drifting Apart

Shared silence was an act of intimacy,
a conversation under Cupid's auspices
All it took between them was a wink,
or just an innocent smile, or a stare
and their thoughts would scamper
to the same direction like migratory birds
escaping the arctic cold for the tropical heat

Twenty years, seven months, four weeks, six days.
What year's calendar was hanging on the bedroom
wall when intimacy backslid into habit?
At what point did the common pursuits
become individual crusades?
In which lap of the journey did a
singular path split into two parallel lines?
How deep was the dark when the dream
precipitously relapsed into an incubus,
like a plot that descended into an anticlimax?

Today, they sit over cups of cappuccino
in the verandah of their imposing castle
Seven wide bedrooms, each with its own
comfort room, one attic for storing history,
two cozy living rooms, one family room for
a family that no longer exists in meaning
More than any other day, the silence pervading
the space between them is so profound,
Not still. Rather reticent. Each could hear

the thoughts of the other. How eloquently
Silence articulates prayers for freedom
from a marriage gone to the sepulcher

How isolated each feels in the other's presence.
In the same spot. But in different worlds...
A titanic sacrilege of an ancient sacrament.

As if themselves insulted,
two cups of steaming hot cappuccino

grow cold.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Elegy To Poverty

Did you see the five-year old boy rummage thru
trash cans for garbage his family could feast on?
Do you behold that pre-school girl peddling
white flowers amidst hurtling cars on perilous
streets as she piously hopes for family supper?
Are you smacked by shame that while the few
snorkel in the lake of prosperity, the multitude
is sinking in the ocean of your wretchedness,
with them babies who know not how to swim?

Oh, Poverty, you are the ruthless scourge that
abbreviates Infancy and impounds Innocence.

Be banished; hide as a skeleton in the cupboard
The time is too soon for the infants to know you
Suffer them to slurp milk from generous cups
Permit them to frolic around with their toy cars
Let them dress up their chubby baby dolls
Pilfer not their mirth and smell of Innocence
Inoculate them from the vile reek of your curse
Let Life be their gift; let it not be their burden!
Let them embrace Faith, not yet Despondence.

Free them to have memories of Beauty and Virtue
for when Innocence fades away and they meet you.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Empty Bed

The figures lying
on the matrimonial bed
are ghosts that have given
up hope of resurrection

Long ago, the laughter died
And then the love
Neither
With will to return
To an empty bed.

(Jan 2002)

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Eternal Truth

Yesterday, you told me
we need to talk
I never doubted
this time would come

Somehow, I always knew
we would meet again
to confront the ghosts
of our past
I always knew
Somehow

Just as it is certain that the
rains come in May
The sun rises after it sets
The poinsettias color the
world red in November
The fireflies blink light
where the air is pure
Death is sure to end
every life every where
This time would come

Between us an ocean,
different lives with different
perspectives
and the unbroken silence
of several summers
I changed my table calendar
more than ten times
Two years ago, I caught my
reflection in the mirror and
saw a woman who has grown
in years; the white hairs said it all
An eternity has passed
but not for a moment
did I doubt
This time would come

Somehow I always knew
that every truncated
conversation must be finished
Every issue demands a closure
And then we can move on

I always knew
We would
Just as daybreak follows
The most tempestuous night.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Eviction Notice

Now that you've said goodbye, go!
The door is impatient for your exodus.

I am an arena of pandemonium-
a garden flaunting its unparalleled
beauty when invaded by stray animals,
a mountaintop campfire radiating
its warmth and luminous flicker when
descended upon by sudden hail storm.
My faith blinded me to the red light.
I can see in the front yard a clutter
of debris and dried leaves like
the wreckage of some other world
But it is my world in tattered shreds.
Those debris are the living ruins of
a romance mangled beyond repair.
Go before I ask you

How can my heartbreak be the postulate
of your happiness with someone else?

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Faces Of War

Lust for carnage
gratified by the blood
of the blameless
and the dirge of
mothers in frantic
search for bodies
of children who
have not come
home from school.

Thirst for gold
quenched by a swill of
barrels of grease
until the supply for
other drinkers
runs dry and out
sated by revolting paucity
in the third world
and inexcusable
affluence in the first.

Greed for power
satisfied by a choking grip on the
destiny of other nations,
slaked by the helplessness and
dependence of children
of lesser gods on the
white men with the guns

It is madness
It is the absence of God
It is the presence of nothingness
It is the abundance of injustice
It is curse.

☐1 September 2002

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Final Thoughts

He stands on the departure area, ready to go
But his thought meanders to his hometown
Where the smell of pine trees is eloquent
in its expression of purity and innocence
Where the rooster's crow is thrilled in
its broadcast of another picturesque day
He longs to saunter the narrow pathway strewn
with pine needles pricking his bare feet
He dreams of the rice paddies covered with
fresh mud and rice stalks after a harvest.

He loves the feel of the soft earth in his hands
as he digs through it in his search for mudfish
He can see the sweet potato fields he frolicked
on, waiting for his mother harvesting greens
His hometown - how it plaintively beckons him
Alas, he is too battered and beaten to move
Morphine, not blood, runs through his veins
And there is not a scintilla of time to go back
He is in a city hospital bed- the waiting area
for the train to take him to the celestial shores

13 December 2006

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Fireworks

The streets are a sea of revelry, of expectation
The drums beat a deep baritone which
hums in the ears long after it is gone
We rush and force our way into bodies
till we get to the most coveted spot
as if we have a monopoly of the
excitement to follow
Even before we draw a dot or think of beauty
A rampage of brilliant colors and shapes forming
into other shapes shatters the darkness in the sky
Life cannot have a gloomy shade
Silence is the expression of wonderment
Then the sound of crackling glass upsets
the stillness. This sound we must meld with our voices
The children within us shriek in delight, as the
sparks descend into earth like tiny will- o'- the- wisps
The stars in the galaxy vanish behind the sparks that
hold us with such force as if we can never be free
Oh, what sweet captivity.
When the last shower of twinkles loses its brilliance,
How soon after will we sink back into the forbidding
prison of fear of cold, hunger and the darkness?
Then we pray for the next holiday
fireworks that conquer them all.

For a moment, at least.

(Written while watching the fireworks during the Baguio City Panagbenga
celebrations in February 2003)

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Flea Market

The rule is wrangle smart
till you squeeze the best quotation
A loftier bid might be
proffered by the competition
The prized commodity
will slip through unwary fingers
Deposit a tender sure
to slake the wily vendor's thirst

Granted, the business foe
might be shorn of capital
But he may bring home the goods
if all things be equal
So craft a clear variation;
create a confident edge
Go to the justice hall now;
discreetly clinch the purchase

Novel articles of trade
embrace the sacrosanct justice
The hallowed hall of fairness
has become a market place
Where gold is a shameful price
for disreputable favors
Lionized connoisseurs of truth
stoop low to be vendors

The monumental edifice stands
but no longer intimidates
To no further extent,
it's different from fetid market places
Time was when society
revered the brown earth it stood on
Now they crash its gates to drop
a bid for a biased evaluation

(23 January 2001)

For John Denver (In Memoriam)

The loud voice that spoke for them without tongue
The courage released where there was almost none
The saber that could pierce apathy and ire
The shield from a rain of bullets gone haywire
The unguent that calmed weeping broken hearts
The refuge of them whose sapped life lost all art
A candle illuminating in the dark
Jasmine strewing fragrance in a stinking park

You asked, What are we making those weapons for?
So much money to waste! Why not feed the poor?
Why do we exile the feeble refugees
When our gluttony forced them on bended knees?
Why do we have three worlds- first, second and third?
Let us tear down curtains, for there is just one world
Women everywhere must have bread and roses
Wind down their toil from years of powerlessness

A small garden snail is a creature to defend
What more human infants unable to fend
For their own survival? Pity them sans power
Life is so sacred, protect it no matter
The cabbage and tomatoes complete life's circle
Honor their significance; respect their innate worth
Creation's a gift; every death must give life
Death that spells more death gives birth to more strife

I listened to you, a child I may have been
I had been repeating your questions since then
You made me imagine a night in the forest
Afterwards, I nurse no dread of snakes and beasts
As I have of men whose hands pull power's trigger
Whose callousness push the world into danger
So what is wealth when it renders others poor
What is an open gate when there is one closed door?

Your songs are in my soul, they are in my bone
You showed how a flower could shatter a stone
Your music is part of what I have become

Searching for fairness in places where is none
Your sweet voice summons, and not just the ear
It nudges the conscience to submit to fear
Of virtues such as love, virtues such as justice
Oh, these we must serve; oh, these we must please

I look for the rhyme and reason in your death
There is none I can see; but I still feel your breath
You had so much to share, and you all you did give
No grave lies in your name; and long you will live!

(This was written a few days before the singer's 10th death anniversary. It reached his family. I grew up listening to the music of John Denver. In life, I have taken the less traveled road in most cases. John Denver has helped arm me with the courage to do that.)

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

From A Son Who Could Not Be His Father

When I was young, you'd hold my hand
We'd swim the seas, explore the land
When ghouls and trolls would visit me
I'd call your name and they would flee
You'd carry me on your shoulders
I'd feel so tall above the earth
Proudly, I'd say when I grow up
I'd be like you, and you would clap

Silver would gather in your eyes
We'd embrace; how time really flies
Then you told me to go to school
To be like you- nobody's fool
But my interests are different
I want to paint every event
Life's exposed truths and hidden lies
I witness with my own two eyes

You love to talk, to entertain
With words you heal a world in pain
You are so good at what you do
But then I can't really be you
I have no wish to disobey
I love you every time of day
I tried to be hard as I could
A rhetorician in your mold

I fear the crowd, its probing eyes
I don't get Socrates and Marx
Van Gogh and Picasso I know
They're men as great as your Rousseau
I think I'm just not meant to be
The copycat of somebody.
Let me pursue my hopes and dreams
Let me hum with the flowing streams

Let me go where the clouds travel
Life's mysteries, I'll unravel
Dance in the rain, fly with the wind

Talk to the hills, hear the bird sing
For while I may not be like you
I love humanity just as you do
Politics works to set them free
Just as art does, so let me be.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Fugitives

The world does not belong to this place
Not to this time
Mine. Yours. Ours together
Marooned in contentment
Yet
Fear laced with sorrow
Slowly, deliberately slithers
Over our peace
Like a snake after its prey
The longing to remain here
In the circle of your embrace
To say vows
We want to honor
But may not
For to honor them
is to be dishonorable
Tugs, stays, tempts, explodes

Our pace rises to crescendo
Impelled to create as much distance
Between us and the world
Chasing us

When the sun vacates the horizon
Darkness is our wide shawl
Hiding us
From the million prying eyes
Our paths are as clear
As our catastrophe
We walk
One soul
Split in two lonely parts going
To opposite directions
Behind us a crumbling arcadia
That was never really ours to keep.

(for MB and CV)

Hideaway

One day, someday I'll disappear
Escape from all these mess and fear
And everyone will want to know
Where I'm holed up, where I did go

When orders come to look for me
Search not where nothing comes for free
Not justice hall and not the mall
Where virtue is a credit full

Do not search in the crowded streets
Where the air sullies as its bleats
Not in neglected parks either
Where the plants have ceased to flower

Find me in the mountains beyond
I will be dreaming 'neath the sun
The mountain is where I've come from
It's where I'll be when I am gone

When my time in this world is o'er
My wish is to be buried there
Let my flesh be joined to the earth
Land is life; my death-a rebirth

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

His House Was Raided By The Army

Firm he stood on the quaking ground of justice
And obliged the cracked lips of mendacity
To declare the truth grappling to surface
From the prison of hollow, specious rhetoric

Then his house was raided by the army

He halted the arms of death before they fired
At his hapless people who could no longer tell
The face of Life from Death, Hope from Trepidation
A flash of light from his nerve unsettled Darkness

Then his house was raided by the army

He marshaled the strength of weeping women
Their virtues slain in the altar of madness and terror
Carefully, he covered their painful nakedness
With promises of hope he sometimes disbelieved

Then his house was raided by the army

Will his tired people adjourn from digging graves,
Or waiting in vain for the ghosts of the disappeared?
When will the torrent of fresh blood dry on the roads
Paved by courage, blasted by terror, entrenching doom?

While he meanders between despair and faith

Another house will be raided by the army. (12 Nov 08)

-This is based on the actual experience of two young human rights workers in Northeast India in 1997. That part of India is terrorized by the state through the Armed Forces Special Powers Act intended to stifle the struggle of Northeast Indians - predominantly indigenous peoples- for self-determination. The Act legitimizes the use of force to curb political dissent. Law enforcers have the authority to arrest, search or even liquidate human beings, if in their judgment, it is necessary for the maintenance of public order. Even rape has been resorted to by state security forces as part of legitimate military operations and it is always committed under a culture of impunity.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Hope

We shape clouds soft as baby cotton diapers
Into lovely dreams of salvation
When the white clouds darken sinister
Like the Devil's hood in the sky
We chase them away into the heavens
Where they retreat from our endless whines
They gather water from earth's hidden springs
And pour it into the labyrinth of hunger
And wait where we are shackled most of the time

The next day, we find
yellow bananas on our breakfast table
And the lively hues on the flowers around us
And then we know: the clouds returned
Not with a vengeance
But sympathy

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Hopelessness

Babies forced out of infancy
To journey to adulthood overnight
Women in cages
Workers eating hunger, sweating blood
People living in doghouses
Such wretchedness
Such pain
Such darkness
I turn on the light in a small corner
The darkness gets deeper
I feel like a banana peel
In a roadside trashcan
After the fruit flies' feast
A blown-up tire
An empty baby formula can

Useless
Waiting for the garbage truck

(Written during one of those moments when nothing seemed to be going right;
24 March 2004)

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

If I Could

If I could find an island
That has no lips
And ears

I would ask you
To take me there
But there is no such place

So I have to embrace
The loneliness
And die in its disgrace.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

In A Cafe With Meager Crowd

They often sit in a café
Whose meager crowd is its lure
While the tea brews
and cream perfects its assault
on the blackness of the coffee,
Their talk spirals from the pit of the mundane
to the limits of the profound
like morning glory leaping out a high fence
from the wet mound of earth

They swap stories about small victories
And large victories
About injustice which is never big or small
Because size is not a benchmark of evil
Which is the only benchmark of itself
They snatch moments of silence among them
That, as though soap bubbles, readily burst
into congruent opinions.

Their collective spirit hangs over them
and shrivels at their depression
over their helplessness
They do so much. Nothing is done.
As if they are pouring water
into permeable barrel
Injustice always cracks victory
What is peace in the cool valleys
When the hills are trembling in fear?

Suppliant for vigor, their spirit nags them
To let laughter soak up the tears that weigh it down
One, somehow, catches the plea
He starts sculling the dialectics
Till they syncopate
Into chats about the weather
Not only. Even the latest scandals
Involving the movie and political stars.
The inane giggles buoy up their sagging spirit

At the close of night,
they move to different directions
Looking forward to the next date
in a café with meager crowd.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

In A Child's Mind, On His First Night Alone

(For Lugat)

Awakening, he hears the sound of creaking floor
Monsters forced their way through his locked door
The rain stomps like a strong soldier on the roof
Someone is angry; the sonorous thunder is proof

He knows under the bed skulks a six-eyed creature
In the dense shadows prowls a three-legged vulture
Yesterday, he saw them inside the television set
They carved a hole on the screen to make an exit

Where is the light? Darkness rules his small room
Without the brightness, adjacent him is his doom
Shaking all over, small body soaked in anxious sweat
He swims deeper into his Winnie the Pooh blanket

Tiny hand clamps little mouth to keep himself quiet
The monsters might hear him and devour him as meat
Where is old Mr. Batman, where is Mr. Spiderman?
For them the scared boy waits, not yet a disillusioned fan.

His parents slumber deep in the connecting budoir
God must rouse them now, to check on the little boy
The rain will sound like music, the monsters will vanish
Gentle words will slice his fear, his nightmare will perish.

(15 June 2000)

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

In That House

Can your memory carry you to that spell
I was five and you were four, when outdoor
frolicking was first on our aspiration list?
Can your memory reconstruct our umbrage
at being grounded inside that big house?
Our favorite spot was that window which gave
us an ample view of the children not like us
We laughed at how they made pots and pans
from the soil that mingled with their pee, and
hankered to share in their brimming delight
The big house was our cage; we were birds
desperate for liberty, and our throats parched
in envy of neighbors playing hide-and-seek
Their resonating laughter only accentuated our
question: why were we different, not the same?

Why could they gambol and we only watch?
Neither our clean shirts, sweet fragrance
and unblemished skin would propitiate us
They had freedom, and the infinite blue sky:
How were we to understand we had our
maladies that immured us within the walls?
In that house, we crafted our own playground
constructed from make-believe and pretense:
Swiftly, we were in the open concourse with
many friends and all gaiety wanting indoors
We even wrote and danced to our own songs
My brother found a friend in me and his sister,
in him: a friendship that spilled out of the house
We left that house: who knows if we will return?
I left that house; I took nothing, but when I think
of all the love inside, I know I carted everything

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Indelible

She left him with a shattered heart
Her tortured tears held their own art
He never figured what they meant
Her sentiments she did not vent

She walked away without a word
His heart-it was pierced with ten swords
The years went by but he waited
To know why their love was ill-fated

By accident they met again
One summer that was graced with rain
All the hurts that plagued the long years
Suddenly vanished with his tears

Never doubt that she loved him so
She set him free, she had to go
The painful choice she had to make
She regretted but had to take

His feet were planted in this place
While her wings aimed for overseas
He longed to chase justice and peace
She wanted a life with more ease

When she came back to set things right
He was married. Gone was her light
She knew by then she lost the fight
Her world could not again be bright

Now that they live in different worlds
Some of their memories are blurred
But there can't be a cloud above
The memories of their first love.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Internalized Oppression

He just left for an errand
He says

Yet again,
I
am
descending
into

the
snake
pit
of
doubts
Or
paranoia.
Or
madness

What's the difference?
Sanity is failing me
In my mind I see them
A rose in hand, he knocks
on her door
She had been anticipating
This moment of solitude
The blissful spell
in each other's arms

I flounder in self-flagellation
Suddenly,
I am a
proowler
not with
my eyes

Compunction stabs me for
invading their private space
even in my mind
My torment shatters my heart

My guilt flirts with my pain

With soon-to-be illicit memories
they load the precious pilfered hours
Every space must
be filled with a kiss, a touch
or, when self-reproach triumphs over,
just an awkward, eloquent smile
(After all, nature abhors a vacuum.)

Perhaps, he feels like a good
soldier betraying his country
or Abraham on the verge of
slaying his beloved Isaac
for his God
He never hurt me before this
How does knowing my existence
in the flesh and blood affect her?
Does she hear an inner voice say
good women do not
their sisters oppress?
Does she squirm in remorse at
her dissoluteness?
Beyond her own, can she see
the wounds gnawing
at my heart?

Or does ecstasy however
tabooed obliterate all thoughts
of me and my sorrow?

She loves him
completely as I do
Sometimes I catch him smiling
at nothing
and then I know:

Nothing is
everything
about her

She makes him happy

I love him too much not to
want that for him

If it comes down to a choice
I would be picked out
She gets a broken heart
Would it give me mirth?
I cannot
print my
signature
on another
woman's grief
Every woman's sorrow is
a mirror of my own
I am every woman's mirror

I am tempted to slacken my grip
Let him run, run into her arms
I am tempted to release him from
his vows
Let them spend eternity together
without me riding heavy on
their conscience
upsetting their arcadia
But how about me?

I am holding on to a delicate thread,
my link to sanity
Even the lake water distends along
its thoroughfare to the sea
The volcano flares up when
its patience is tested beyond
the fence of its berth

I do not know how long
I can keep the dam
from breaking
I must hold the fort

A cry for myself
is a campaign waged
against a sister's happiness.

(for MCU)

16 June 2007

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Internalized Oppression II

The ghost
does not
see its
reflection
in the mirror

For even it
is afraid of
itself.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Invisible

(for the indigenous peoples)

We were born rich in an abundant land.
Then they saw us and all of a sudden

We were invisible. They did not see us
when they came to vandalize the burial
grounds of our ancestors to herald the
fabrication of counterfeit lakes and rivers
with strong flux to command brightness
for faraway places they called civilization.
We looked at our future-

It
was
dark.

We were invisible. They did not see us
when they came with their bulldozers
and made plains of our mountains, our
home and refuge for millions of years.
In the sacrosanct name of development,
they erected chateaus for the bourgeois.
We looked at our home-

it
was
gone.

We were invisible. They did not see us
when with supercilious air, they flounced
into our florid forest thieving her coins and
jewelry; she is now void inside, threadbare
on the surface, dumped by false gods who
wallow in the brimming briny of her wealth.
We looked at ourselves-

we
were
poor.

We are the people whose life is the land

The land is departed; so are we demised.
We flounder in the miasma of destitution.
Our invisibility was our strong impotence.
Our invisibility was our victorious defeat.

Our visibility
is our campaign
against invisibility.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Invite To A Quaint, Sleepy Town

Let us pack a few things. Let
our feet take us to Besao
where the crow and a colony of ants
can forecast the weather better than
overpaid bright minds who warn
us to wear raincoats on a day that
will salute us and abscond with sunshine,
Where there are no newspapers
screaming violence, rape and murder

Experience the awe of drinking water
from the tap without the scourge of amoeba
swimming with vicious intent in your intestines
Marvel in watching people mingle with
one another as if no one is a stranger
Witness green sprouts come out of the wet
earth a few days after the first bead of rain
and be acquainted with the miracle of creation
Watch the white clouds dance against a clear,
blue sky by day, and a myriad stars
flicker in the vast outer space by night
Smell the air perfumed by pine trees
Walk a mile under the shade of thick trees
planted by Nature's hand
Lose yourself in the night and find your soul
trying to figure out how fireflies could
shatter the darkness and why they do
not seem to adore life in the city
Watch a brook with lucid water, never
defiled by venom-carrying Styrofoam

Then let's return to this concrete jungle
and rejoin the daily rat race
where the powerful survive and the weak
eased out like condemned office equipment
Where the next-door neighbor is a stranger
And Cain is a model while the Good
Samaritan is the world's best-told fluke
Where we are forced to stare out into a

horizon darkened by soot from the children
of our brains and poison from our refuse

Then we remember a quaint, sleepy town
And know that things could be different.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Irony

On a dimly lit night, underneath that giant
yakal while mosquitoes hovered above us
you ended us with a tight embrace and sobs
and answers that left a trail of questions
The struggle of the stars to pierce through the
ebony November night raced against my vain
effort to probe the window of your soul and
decipher the message of your abandoned tears
Students passing by stared, perplexed, at us
But their curiosity was no match to my own:
Why? What secrets do you keep from me?

Here I am reading a landmark case on the
rights of people to access to information
But the words have no life in my thoughts
where our inchoate conversation futilely
strives to complete itself and make sense
Your face -contorted in pain and drenched
in helpless tears- graphically intrudes into my
thoughts and blots out all images and concerns
No semblance to the woman who strolled with me
on the university gardens where we sat and
gazed at the stars as we dreamt of eternity

I rerun the throbbing of your heart as it beat for me
Have I mistaken it for a promise of the future?
I braced myself for a proposal, not your unilateral
declaration we must separately pave new pathways
I appraise the ruins of a future that collapsed when
you shook its foundation before it was even laid
What an irony! Together, we survived that powerful
July earthquake that left thousands without life
Often while alone with you I always felt secure as
though cordoned by a crowd of friends and family
from a wretched world where evil lurks from all sides

Now, I am surrounded by friends and I am alone.

(For Inah)

☒ February 1991

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Isang Pintuang Bukas

(Alay kay James Balao)

Ako'y laging nakatitig sa isang bukas na pintuan

Isang gabing mapanglaw naaninag ko ang hugis ng `yong anino
Maingat ko `tong inabot habang ito'y tuluyang umukit sa kawalan,
Ng aking nilikhang patuloy-tuloy na imahinasyon
Kailangan mong malaman ang piniping iyak
Na gumambala sa katahimikan ng gabi,
O di kaya'y ng dilim ng pangakong binitiwang
Laban sa paligid ng liwanag ng araw
Nakaupong naghihintay, ang `yong inang binalot ng karamdaman,
Walang muwang sa iyong pagkawala
Hiling nyang kamutin mo ang kanyang likod

Minsan, pag-asa'y mistulang naaaninag nang buong linaw
Sa panalangin ng marami-
Mga magsasaka, mag-aaral, manananggol,
Mga guro, manggagawa, kaibigan
Hinahalughog lahat ng sulok para sa'yo
Ngunit ang poot ng rumaragasang unos
Ang siyang lumulusaw ng pag-asa sa maselang yaring luha

Kahapon lamang, ang Haring Araw ay masidhing sumisikat
Ang `yong mga kaibiga'y dumating. Aming hinanda ang tapuy
Sa mamahaling banga ng `yong lolo
Mga ninuno nati'y uminom ng tapuy at nagdiwang
Ang lumang kanin ay mapula, muntikang magkulay lila
Yaong galling sa Kalinga, laging ninanais
Minasdan namin ang mga litrato mo at inakdang likha
At nagunita ang `yong mga salita at mga pagnanais
Ang pag-ibig mo sa katotohanan, hustisya, pagkakapantay pantay at karangalan

Ako'y biglang nagising kaninang umaga
Sa tinig ng malakas ng ulang bumabayo sa bubong
Ang mga patak ng ulan ay bumasa sa kumakaluskos na sahig
Mula sa butas na iyong tinapalan sa lumipas na buwan
Ikaw ba'y pumalya o binalak mo itong gawin sa susunod na pagkakataon?
Ito ba ay sa may bintana kalakip ang pag-asang titila ang ulan

At ang sinag ng araw ay gagapang sa loob ng `yong silid?
Isiniwalat sa radio na anim na minero ang nakulong sa lagusan at sinuko ang
multo
Ngunit sampu ang sumakop sa kamatayan at pinahiya ang bagyo

Marami pang dapat gawin hinggil sa paghihikahos ng masa
Aking anak, ang pintuang iniwan nang walang anumang salita ay bukas
Ito'y mananatiling bukas hanggang sa ika'y magbalik

***This Tagalog translation is by Elton Jun Veloria. The original English poem is
'Open Door.'

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Kayapa Sunrise

You are The Great Kabunian's handiwork
None but He can blend and match colors
And paint such consummate splendor
Using the infinite sky above for canvas
Beyond caustic hands spilling malice
As you crawl like fire reaching the sky
My eager pen tries to describe you
But struggles for the perfect words
You dance with abandon in the horizon
Tantalizing my vision with hues of red
And yellow and orange, all vibrant
Like a lovers' campfire in the sky
Hoping to spill comfort from its warmth
The grass glistening from dewdrops
Awaits the soft, warm kiss from your lips
A thin, shy cloud cinctures your waist
And tops your crown, drinking your light
Losing its nature, becoming light itself
Becoming part of you, forgetting it is cloud
Fully knowing the morning is your show
Slowly, you change your shape in the sky
As white clouds pull you from the depths
Of your hiding place behind Sierra Madre
Your beauty takes a different shape
My camera captures your enigmatic smile
Which becomes mine, till it consumes me
I pray to hold you still, still in one place
To kneel before your unmatched grace
When hideousness creeps into my world

(14 April 2008)

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Legacy: From Mother To Mother

My warmest memories are of Mama's hands
Gently running, as if on tiptoe, through my hair
Like soothing balm on a deep cut on the knee
Or sweet melody that howls down the clatter
Of sleep thieves with three eyes and giant fangs
Her calmative touch held off fears and bad dreams
With loving fingers, she would weave a warm cocoon
Impenetrable by rackets and dreadful behemoths
I would ride on cotton-soft clouds above the sky
And shake hands with angels who defied nightmares

I lie in bed with my precocious four year old girl
The cold night aged and walked past her bedtime
I run my fingers through fine strands of her hair
She yawns and begins a peaceful journey to sleep
The bad characters that visit at night are put away
In the distant future, I conjure an intense vision
Of a young mother combing a sleeping baby's hair
With loving fingers while thinking of her old mother

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Long Wait

(for Martha)

You clasped my hand during the last call
"Wait whatever happens. We have it all."

I will never forget that wink you gave me before
You disappeared behind the large waiting door
To ride on the wings of a World War II plane
See the world outside, then come back again
To shake off the gnawing sadness within
I waved even if you could not see me then
For the first time, your son kicked in my womb
You were gone, I realized; it hit me like a bomb
Like a busy leech, I fiercely held the ground
So you'd find me if you chose to turn around.

Our house welcomed me back with sympathy.
Nay a portent of doom, I started eagerly
To wait as I promised; I'd think of nothing else
Birds came and went, a fish became extinct
The moon altered its shape more than a thousand times
Not once did I stop singing our secret rhymes
Your son's voice changed; he grew beyond my reach
He knew of your existence – there were the wooden crates
From across the miles- filled with everything but you
One day, he quit asking when your return was due

But I waited even when you married over there
I had to wait. "Whatever happens, " did you not whisper?
I am bound- a promise is a promise; it is none other
Your son became a man, my head a riot of silver
The wooden crates kept coming- they kept hope alive
I waited for years; what's twenty more or twenty-five?
For even birds that wander far across the wide oceans
May linger but always fly back to their native lands

Today, I heard of your death on the other shore
Tomorrow, your fourth wife will bury you there
Here I am- sad, grieving for all it was not worth

It just hit me- I am so old, so sapped of mirth.

You clasped my hand during the final boarding call
I waited, waited whatever happened for no one at all.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Macliing Dulag's Warding-Off Speech

If Kabunian gave you a land of milk and honey
and ordered you to take care of it for posterity
What will you do if intruders want to take
it away?

I imagine that you will fight
For they who do not are ungrateful to
Kabunian; they value not His gift
They ignore his command to defend the land
in the name coming generation thousands of years from now
They who do not, spit on the graves of their ancestors
who preserved the land for them
For land is life
For life is the land

If you were in our place
You will fight
You will fire your guns as we raise our spears
You will probably pay your way to the justice system
that does not understand our ways
For that is what you did to grab the lands of people
Like us on the other side of the mountain

So do not be stubborn in your ignorance of
Why we refuse to vacate the land which had
always been our home

We are the Palestinians in Palestine
The Lumads in Mindanao
The Mangyans in Mindoro
We are the Martians in Mars

Go away. Let our people sleep in peace

Tonight. And the night after.

(Macliing Dulag was the indigenous hero who led the opposition against the establishment of the Chico River Dam in the Cordillera, Philippines- a project conceived without the knowledge of the affected indigenous peoples. He was

killed by the military on 24 April 1984.)

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Meeting Her First Love After Six Thousand Days

In a sparsely crowded coffee shop they sit across each other
Between them an expansive space breathing with mordant
tobacco smoke and gauche colloquy on their children
The habit of silence for six thousand days fiercely competes
against the restrained eagerness to explore the past and
finish a truncated conversation, its incompleteness like the
troubled spirit of a man who, unready, departed the earth
And then his words slice through the awkward muteness
"What we had was real. I really loved you back then."
Oh, rich, did he have the temerity to say those words?
The only things real to her were of fathomless pain and
colossal tragedy standing on the frail ashes of his love
He maneuvered the wheel, detoured and callously
dropped her stranded on the road of aimlessness
then drove away in tears, afraid to confront his goblins

Her eyes begin to burn with acerbic tears; they would
not cascade down her cheeks as if in proud protest
She summons the vision of the girl six thousand
days ago: confused, depressed, heart in shreds
The loneliness, the desperation that she seriously
thought of finally escaping by crossing the bar
Did he know out of her disheveled state and fragile
emotion she determined to reconstruct a life?
Between then and now things happened on their own
Her inexorable anguish. Her guilt. Her relationships.
His. Her marriage. His. Her strength of character.
Cell phones. His silence. Hers. Email technology.
His silence. Hers. The Philippines became the
world's texting capital. His silence. Hers.
Their careers. Their comfortable places in society.
Their lingering youthful looks except for strands of
her grey hair and the lines of his fine wrinkles
His silence. Hers. The silence matured into a habit
and permeated the ample space between them.
He was heaved into the dustbin of her memory.
Finally. Or so she thought. Or wanted to think.

And after Earth rotated on its axis six thousand times

unexpectedly he sprang alive and said, "Let's talk."
Has she unconsciously been racing for ages toward
this chance to listen to the articulation of his reasons?
Way behind schedule, this moment is a gift so unlike
the taciturn indecipherable language of sixteen years
As muteness crumbles, it buries the aged emotional
hang-ups, now swiftly banished as a chimeral ghost
This reunion is the only reality as questions are cast
liberally while answers are copiously thrown back
Ah, so sweet is the realization that in love there is
not a space for forgiveness, only understanding
So liberating are the lessons learned on hindsight
Things unsaid and nurtured secrets transform into
baggage that prevent love in the context of freedom
You jettison your emotional suitcase and you soar high
and fly -eagerly- home where the warm nest waits.

The cobwebs are cleared, the blinding dust has settled
The smoke has dissipated, a torch is extinguished as
a new one is lit, a door closes while another one opens
And finally they stand facing each other to say goodbye
Without baggage in her heart, she takes her first steps
away from the past. But why are her footsteps heavy?

Why is this second valedictory
more poignant than the first?

☐ May 2007

☐

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Messenger Of Hope

For a paltry sum, I can tell your future
I can reverse your bad karma

The man speaks with an air of confidence
not complemented by his putrid smell and hair
that has not known water and shampoo for days
Neither by his variegated knitted sweater-
The same one he wore yesterday and before that
My skepticism must be flaunted by my squinted eyes
He rewards me with a winsome smile flashing
spacious gaps between teeth poverty could not bridge
I surrender my direct glower and scrutinize him
from peripheral vision and vigilant ears
A married woman holds out her callused palm

You will find a rich husband

I suppress a laugh meant to sneer, but somehow
he audibly hears the sound I did not emit
I almost believe he has power beyond my
narrow comprehension, outside my little faith
Is it to me that he addresses his word of wisdom?

Those who do not believe will not reap a reward
For it is written: Where reason ends, faith begins

Before the red painted by guilt on my face subsides,
a former overseas worker stretches her palm

Your feet will grow sturdy and wide wings
and you will reach the other side of the ocean

Some of us leave the room with pretext for hilarity
after a weary day spent in stressful confines
Others go energized by jubilant songs in their hearts
after the man deciphers the secrets of intricate
codes in their outstretched palms, onto which
he generously dropped promises of good fortune

Does hunger shove the hungry to professions
of deception and obliterate the non-believer's
doubt in soothsayers and fortune-tellers?

All is lost when even hope goes
In the midst of destitution, this man

keeps it alive.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Middle Age

(for Lean on his 39th birthday)

Like a swing, we are
caught
between the past and the future
We survey the years in the calendars
we dumped into the trash can
The remembered feel of our mothers
cuddling us to their breasts
soothing away our nightmares
The bitter-sweet memories of youth
Of the joys we can know only in first love,
of the pain only fallen first loves brings
Of elations, of heartbreaks
Of vows broken, of vows honored
The smell of baby powder on the miracles
that emerged from our loins or wombs,
a testimony that life does not die
Of marches on the streets chanting appeals
to the Establishment
Of defeats, of successes

How gratifying to take in that the years behind
are not under losses on life's balance sheet
Suddenly, we want to be stranded in the present
to be closer to the past and its gains
In the inevitable march to the future,
we hesitate to cross the frontier
But a look beyond our weary steps
exposes the opportunities ahead
beckoning like the tantalizing brilliance of
diamonds and rubies
A world of dreams to pursue and
promises to fulfill
How seductive the future is
as it waits for us!

We hate changing calendars
Each one thrown is a distance closer to the tomb

But it is also a distance away
from heartaches only time can heal,
from mistakes only time can consign to the oblivion

The years have been of laughter and pain
The days have been short, the days have been long
In the coming days they will be so
For life, truly, is a grand design of time,
A time to weep, a time to laugh
A time for heartbreak, a time for ecstasy:
always a puzzling mixture of both
always a fascinating smorgasbord
of contradictions and constants,
of synonyms and antonyms

Not a curse to be exorcised
Age is destiny to be embraced

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Middle Child Syndrome

I was always trapped in the center
like the rusty fulcrum of the see-saw,
never way up, never way down
'The rule is not to argue against them
who from you, deserve respect.
Age is the edge they have over you.
Be considerate; yield to the younger
ones -infants do not know any better.'
The one in the wrong. I was all times.

Mama, I cannot describe my sentiment
when you did not order my brother to
respect the twenty one months I lived
earlier than he did. Remember? I locked
myself in a room and refused to eat, a
good excuse not to do the pile of dishes.
I resented you for not telling my sister-
your daughter for close to a decade
longer than I am- to grant me an ample
berth of patience for my mistakes. I was
just the bold one, the quarrelsome one,
the one who overlooked the age gap.

You thought I was beyond intimidation.
You thought I did not need kid gloves.
I wanted room for righteous indignation;
you gave me one in another building-
the room for strength of character.
I had to bring home medals. I had to fail.
I had to get you to notice I could be on
top, or at the bottom, not in the center which
eyes not so thorough could overlook.
I wanted out, out of the middle. Who would
not? It is never the most cozy space. You
get squeezed from both sides till you ossify
like stone and become irrelevant. Some
get tough, but that is the miracle.

Mama, you made me forget whether I

was the older or the younger. It never
mattered to you. You made me forget
my age. To this day, I do not know.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Miracle Of The Rain

The silvery globules of rain
that shimmer on the leaves
are harbingers of promise
that life will never end

Notice how:

After the rain merrily descends
on the scorched, cracked earth,
new sprouts will emerge
into a plenitude swarming
where life did not reveal any sign
for months feared to stretch to eternity.
The air used to smelling like choking dust
becomes fresh with the fragrance of flowers
that gloriously proliferate in various colors
like mushrooms after the first year's shower falls.

I hold my breath knowing it to be pure.
I let the air sanctified by rain travel to my brain.
Thoughts of this life's common mystery
weave into a dance of discovery
till they become a song of hope -
Every morning I will find a wet silvery sheen
on the leaves of my green and yellow scandens
and red anthuriums.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Not The Wind

(To the Lepanto proletarians)

Not the wind, my child.
It is the ululation of women who
regard their pots unacquainted with
a grain of rice since the day
before last and before last.
The robbers seized the harvest
and braced the bank.
A mother beckons the neighbors.
They congregate around a fire that for a
drawn-out time has not scorched animal heft.
They cuddle babies squealing for milk
and nourish their souls with love and the
ancient wisdom that what goes up must
come down.

Not the rain, my child.
It is the tears from lachrymal glands of
fathers whose hearts are shred in fragments
as the self-proclaimed gods
mercilessly snatch the spoons
from the mouth of their children.
The stomach is void
but esurience animates the spirit
and stokes the struggle
to oblige the gods to unshackle their clutch
on the gold beget by beads of
perspiration and blood of the proletariat.
The beat of Igorot gongs muffle the slander
flowing unrestrained from the vocal chords of
the gods who mock a beautiful culture
as immemorial as time
to disguise their trepidation of
liberty.

Not a song, my child.
But like a song it is a tongue of the soul:
A familiar voice from the bowels of the grave-

Workers of the world, unite!
You have nothing to forfeit but your chains
and a world to gain.

-21 October 2005

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Of Fences And Distances

I told you often. Long ago I learned
Distance is not measured by the meters
Of space from one estate to another
Rather by the height of the fence
Or the thickness of the walls
Or the presence or absence of barbed wires
Between
Or the silence in the space midway

Take South Korea and North Korea for example
Hands in the same kimchi jar, joined
Like Siamese twins standing head-to-head
Yet split by an ideological fence
Far wider than the distance between
South Africa and Greenland

There are the godly states of Israel and Palestine
Separated by a security wall no thicker than
the eddy of fog clouding my despairing mind
The same womb bore their people. I wonder,
did it conceive the immense chasm between
them that even God seems unable to bridge?
They row their boats to opposite directions
With plans to remove the other from the map

Closer, here we are
Sharing the same room
Sleeping in the same bed
Separated by distance
A formidable fence between

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Of Regrets Over Wasted Days

Wasted days are regrets of age
When plans that stayed plans rear their head
Guilt, nostalgia, even umbrage
Disturb us for not having read
The ancient writing on the wall
Carpe diem! We must seize the day
While we are quick and time is tall
Youth's strength leads our feet to the way

But youth reckons eternity
There's the morrow, vast stretch of time
To capture dreams that need to be
Caught; Youth is never out of prime
Slowly, years roll like silent tears
Unnoticed as the thief of night
Plans are postponed for the next years
Till they fly in the sky like kite

When the skin sags, the hair turns gray
Mortality consumes the thought
Then we do an inventory
Of plans done, plans that were for naught
That's when regret weighs our minds down
We curse lackadaisical youth
We imagine that tasks were done
These thoughts, like spilt milk, are all moot

So while we're young, let's seize the day
Regret shan't spoil the sunset's hue
Where fulfillment is, join the fray
When sunset comes, with joy we'll go
A lifetime unscathed by regrets
Is life well-lived, full of spirit
Exist for others; it's the best
Tribute to life – such a rare gift.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

On Encouraging A Woman To Write A Dying Old Flame

(for N.D.C.)

I am the messenger; how I hate the parcel
I dropped; it weighs down your bruised heart, I see it swell
Your head lamely drops as if your life met defeat
With an everyday news- someone's imminent death
I listen to the words you would not say to me
You narrow your lachrymose eyes as if to see
A picture beyond the present's range of vision
Remembered rupture and pain, hardly illusion

Moments pass. You speak of youth walking in the rain
Raking dropped autumn leaves, gobbling lunch on the plain
Dreams of forever shared under the setting sun
Lingering incubus after his abrupt run
The dreams became a thorn, perforated your heart
Fate gave a naked life, shivering without art
Betrayal froze your hopes, derailed all time and tide
You buried love; but I doubt if it really died.

Tears cascade your face; how forlorn every dropp is
From yonder days they come, without a touch of bliss
Now you reach for paper and pen and start to write
Release the pain and anguish that made cold the nights
I sense a fierce battle between your heart and mind
The courage to pierce stretched silence is hard to find
Your letter is undone, but then it must be done
For one chance ignored is a precious chance let gone

Haste won't make waste; the punctual sun will soon be down
Late is better than ne'er; a smile outdoes a frown
His time is almost up; he still waits for your dove
Even anger and pain, they too can come from love
After years of loving, forgiveness comes with ease
Such one gift will make your beloved rest in peace
Open your mouth; sing loud your bitter-sweet refrain
Tomorrow you'll look back with joy, without the pain.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

On National Heroes Day

On this day, we remember the women and men
All too aware that death was their destiny certain
When in darkness and doom they scattered flames
A big number without faces, many without names
No pit of gloom too deep, no wall of might too high
Firm resolve knew no barrier- liberty was so nigh
Their blood was shed on the land cast in despair
They fell listening to small wings flapping in the air

It mattered not if the future would concede the cost
To brighten its direction, even their dreams were lost
They tore down all stones in the castle of oppression
Not one dream survived, none but their fiery vision
Of posterity marching outside the dungeons, so free
From the wickedness of brute power and tyranny
What, alone, counted –when our time would come
We would storm power chambers to rescue freedom

On this day, we remember their supreme sacrifice
The drops of their blood that for liberty was the price
There is nothing of meaning in those ceremonies
None in the accolades, none in the lavish wreaths
None in the costly fireworks, none in the cavalcades
We insult their martyrdom, we blaspheme their deaths
While we leisurely fold our arms as a tyrant reigns
While we snore as our freedom is shackled in chains

Truth sets us free, but we live in an ambience of lies
Evil is before us, but we are blind with open eyes
Truth is hoarded in our thoughts, whispered at night
Our world is plunged in darkness, desperate for light
The streets are now aimless, their voice stifled by fear
Our conscience murmurs low; we pretend not to hear
We are unworthy legatees of the heroes' sacrifice
Freedom is trampled down by the force of cowardice

Our mastered silence is our acquiescence to tyranny
Big onus we must accept for the requiem for liberty
But redemption is never late; from slumber we arise

With the valor of ghosts, we hoist truth, conquer lies
Like a mother guards her child, let us protect freedom
Our power as one nation honors the heroes' martyrdom
Not a moment we can waste; let truth precede our way
Until freedom returns with the unfussy light of day

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

On The Old High School Grounds

Some memories of this old place are glued to my mind
As if a gecko comfortably adhering to a polished fence
Affirmed by the landmarks, the big or small things I find
Like the mosses on the posts dominating the front stage
Or the flight of steps leading to the country churchyard
I have always carried my warm thoughts of childhood
Spent on these grounds, in these rooms, with teachers
And classmates, like a family heirloom in a large pouch
Memories dimmed by time and space now return in a flash
Speeches, sermons, declarations, even shared silences
Recaptured, an artificial fountain cascading to its source
I just know I stood on this very spot, as if it was yesterday

Forgotten feelings of happiness, even of sadness resurface
Like a torrent of rain in summer, unexpected yet welcome
Familiar as the mutiny of graphic colors in the western sky
Just before sunset, even years after the last one you saw
Half remembered episodes no longer ache for completion
The blanks are filled in by an old classmate's face or shape
Or laughter or comment that belonged, first, to another time
I have reclaimed what I lost when I departed from this place
One part of myself perpetually homesick is home at last
Still, there are silhouettes that will remain silhouettes
Such as voices from the grave we know not whose and where
Sad tears burn our yearning for affairs forever misplaced

Like spilt milk, nothing remains, not even their memory
Forever suppliant for remembrance, forever a mystery
Some events this transmogrified place professes no more
The wooden armchairs with Andres' name have vanished
Like the brilliance of the constellations on a cloudy night
I see not the wooden room where A professed a fawn's love for B
Or the tall poinsettia, near where, perhaps, devious young men
Coaxed naïve girls for a first kiss, under the shroud of darkness
Ants crawling over their feet, mosquitoes humming overhead
Or an old literature book with my name scrawled in my hand
On the page immortalizing Markham's "The Man With A Hoe"
Or the room from which boomed dear old John's singing voice

Or the kitchen where I cooked my first and last rhubarb jelly
There my vision of me as chef began and ended like a bubble
Landmarks are gone or different, their ghosts hauntingly vivid
Like calcified stomps of trees smitten by age as old as time
How classmates now look slowly supersede our clear recall
Of their young faces; there are novel features of interest-
Paints of red on lips and cheeks the Besao wind used to crack
The double chins, crow's feet, fine lines marking the forehead,
The bulges, as though humps of soft earth on a road once flat
Strands of grey hair elegantly highlighting stress or wisdom
Like freckles of stubborn dust on antique, augmenting its worth
Our teachers look younger; how they used to look so much older

The trees, the buildings, the ground- this place has shrank-
A small corner of the wide world we, as small specks, live in
The wide world our education in these premises spoke for
Yet the size of a place is not the magnitude of its significance
We have gone to places whose plain sense of things we forgot
We may have moved out of this place; it never moved out of us
There are new things in this old place, old things in this new
Most dear teachers retired or traveled to the Great Beyond
But their spirits, erasing their absence, pervade the rooms
As if the lingering whiff of perfume of someone who just left
The new ones have taken their places in the old classrooms,
Captivating the esteem of the young people we once were

There is a new building, a new facade, a new tree, a new leaf
Set against the old rustic ambience with the city's amenities
This place looks oh, so achingly familiar, yet wistfully foreign
Young people crossing my path seem to pause to stare at me
With the intimidating mien of locals appraising a stranger
I have that foreboding sense that one day in two decades
They will come back as I have, stand on this same old ground
And brood as I do with a mixed sense of elation and nostalgia
A sense that will morph drearily into deep, dark melancholy
During the long ride away from the home of their childhood.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

On This Cold Day

(In Memoriam)

They fell. One by one, heroes fell
On their blood against cold, harsh stones
Last words pled for the masses' weal
Their death justice alone atones

Compelled into reluctant graves
Bodies lost, but never their quests
With zeal they lived for why they died
Peace and justice - our common pride

Terror reigns in these trying times
Do we blaspheme their sacrifice
With muted cries and cowardice
Or do we confront greed and lies?

One lesson learned from their bloodstream
Lives are worth losing for our dream
On this cold day we honor them
With warm courage, none less fitting

The air's grim stillness, let us fill
With voices strong, unwavering
United, steadfast, we fulfill
The quest for freedom. Let us sing!

-10 December 2005

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Open Door

(for James Balao)

I keep looking toward an open door

One night I saw your vivid silhouette
I gingerly reached for it as it crystallized
into a figment of my constant imagination
Must you know about the muffled cries
That punctuate the serenity of night
Or the darkness of promise set against
The backdrop of daylight?
Your sick mother sits in her wheelchair
Oblivious to your disappearance
She keeps asking you to scratch her back

Sometimes, hope looms large
In the prayers of the multitude-
The peasants, students, lawyers,
Teachers, workers, friends
Searching every corner for you
But the torrent of angry typhoons
Dissolves hope so tenuous in its tears

Yesterday, the sun was shining bright
Your friends came. We brewed rice wine
In your grandfather's prized Ming jar
Our ancestors drank tapuy to celebrate
The old rice is very red, almost violet-
the ones from Kalinga you always liked
We looked at your old photos, writings
Remembered your words, your passions
Your love for truth, justice, equity, honor

Alas, I woke up this morning
To the sound of strong rain hammering on the roof
Droplets of rain are wetting our creaking floor
From the hole you did not patch last month
You missed that or planned to patch it later?
I sit by the window hoping the rain peters out

And sunshine crawls its way inside your room
The radio just announced that six miners
Trapped inside tunnels gave up the ghost
But ten conquered death, shaming the typhoon

A lot of work still needs to be done
My son, the door you left without a word is open
It will remain open until you return.

(James Balao, a Filipino activist for the defense of life and ancestral lands of the indigenous peoples disappeared on 17 Sept.2008. His mother is bedridden and his father has embarked on a difficult search mission with other activists and concerned sectors.)

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Orphan

(for Vanessa)

Stranger, let me bare my heart
It is beached in this strange land
Like a bird resting peacefully
in someone's nest
Home is not always
Where the heart is
I left home to find my way
Back to it
There, under its roofs
I am lost

I am orphaned from my skin color
And the contours of my nose
My skin is not in my thoughts
But my thoughts are eager to explore my skin

My past is not downstreamed
In my genetic history
I am like a passenger in a bus
Destiny uncertain
My lips' contour bear no resemblance
to the language they speak
I am desperate to understand
Stories I never heard
And conquer myths
from threads of rejection woven by shame
My parents
see shame etched on my forehead
And the past I want to visit
Their silence eloquently
Reveals their embarrassment
when confronted about their history
By their own skin color, no doubt

(Written for Vanessa, a black American I met on board a Victory Liner Bus traveling from Manila to Baguio City, Philippines; July 2007)

Orphaned Heritage

Wearing Pierre Cardin neckties, they
come and go through the corridors of
dominion bearing surnames that divulge
their ethnic origin and cultural heritage
their air without a modicum of faint link
to the values that thrived on the bond
between the land and their mothers' wombs
They care not that Bangan and her sisters
were pushed to bare their breasts to drive
away the usurpers come to destroy the
sacred burial grounds of their ancestors
They have not partaken of the wisdom
breathed by the dap-ay that shielded their
ancestors' harvests and health from curse
In their swivel chair they dream of the cash
that gush from the water falls and the money
sprouting from trees in the thick forests
They ignore the cries of the womb
as it pleads for the land that sustains it.

From their cold dap-ay seats now of concrete,
the guardians of the ancient way of life
that perpetuated the womb watch helpless
like beaten war soldiers at the insolence
of the men whose time has yet to come
How they callously flaunt the power to
delet their people's nexus to the past and
catapult the culture of the doomed; all that
matters is the clinking of the gold, oblivious
that love of it is the harbinger of death
They who are orphaned from their
surnames while their fathers still breath,
they are alienated from the land that
perpetuated their bloodline since ages
A life of greed is the scourge of a lineage
It steals the rice grains of generations
and causes the gut of the few to burst
as they party in their Pierre Cardin ties
The womb that endured a wing of long

insults will commiserate with the abused
land and massacre the kernel it nurtures

Land is life; the bloodline ends with it

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Parting

How did it happen that the eternal love
that once pervaded this room vanished
like the morning haze upon the lake today?
And how does it happen that I have
turned up in my destination as I leave you,
and you will depart from here as you stay?

I will gingerly maroon my memories
upon some undiscovered, serene shore.
I will watch the inexhaustible horizon
as they kiss the edge of the ocean floor.
The old sun will rest and it will tower
to open for me a wide welcoming door.

Raindrops are falling but they will stop.
The cold, cold winds will begin to howl.
Apprehensions and hopes now fill my air
as the bitter-sweet truth rings in my soul:
My joyous arrival is my sad departure;
My sweet victory is my poignant fall.

(for Rose; 11 Dec 1999)

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Premises Of A Revolution

The noise drowns all the rhetoric
on a culture so misunderstood and cashed in
The microphone booms with voices of
self- proclaimed experts
The board blares and glares with letters and syntax
that profess to be the truth
Those who hold the gospel of a culture as ancient
as Adam and Eve gather around fire on a mountain's zenith
The older generation chants to the gods
as the hope of the future beat the gongs
Kabunian has blest the past with full harvests
Want was an unheard word
But a few leaped to the loft and grabbed
the food for the legion
Hunger and desperation were born and multiplied as
gluttony became robust
Now, gluttons give token service to want
that they may have more of what desperation lacks
Outside the extensions of schools rock rooms with
heavy words cast upon microphones
They speak of the ways of the mountains untrod
by their delicate legs set on high heels
and misshapen by machines that dug the earth's bowels
in eternal mission to abstract the yellow stone
A mission never accomplished
while greed is etched in the heart of the compradors
and the corporate elite and the banks
Money pours in, but not a cent
for them that cling to the gods
for hope to save their mountains from the curse
that buried thousands of weeping willows and infants
and torrents of murky water gush out with pollution from
the technology of development bringing destruction
In the end, who must pay?
Those with blood on their hands enter the palace
and march the halls where the assembly rules
Where speeches put earth upon earth
on bodies that wailed for justice
never to be remembered

But their cries will ring clear in the ears
of the orphaned throng
They were there
They will grip the bullet and pull the trigger
Seize, seize
Reclaim what was theirs and reverse the wheel.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Proposal

Each time we meet
Under this canopied lattice
of yellow flowered vines
It gets harder to say goodbye
Until we meet again
Under this canopied lattice
Of yellow flowered vines

Each time we meet
on the streets for a picket
to fulminate against injustice
It gets harder to say goodbye
Until we meet again
On the streets for a picket
To fulminate against injustice

Each time we meet
For dialectics on human misery
and political upheavals
It gets harder to say goodbye
Until we meet again
For dialectics on human misery
And political upheavals

Maybe this is the sign
That we pull the plug on this
routine of meeting only to
reluctantly say goodbye later

Maybe this is the sign
That we should say
Goodbye for the last time

Perhaps we should get married?

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Reflections On Fahrenheit 9/11

I can smell the raw tangy scent
of will drying in my hand
I see the shape of dreams
Escaping the bowels of the fields
Like a thick swirl of smoke from a
Tire factory's chimney
What is life but a flash of light
A bomb can easily put out
Until no one hears a town's last cry?
No one listens to the orphans' prayers
Having seen too much, too early
even infants know the meaning of mortality
For life is but a slave
To a conscience run amok
For the price of every dropp
of blood of the innocent
is a heavy pocket from firearms
and napalm bombs
"No war, no weapons business!
No mutilation, no murder!
No murder, no war! "
Grand dreams weaved in the brains
Of small bodies
Barely out of the womb
Become evanescent shades of themselves.
(11Sept06)

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Remembering Grandfather

He gathers us to his throne-
in a dirty kitchen my memory
summons as a perpetual campfire
In the world's largest pot,
pig food is cooking. As always.

My brothers and I sit down
in front of a newly-built fire,
bright flickers dancing in mid air
just above it, like fireflies emerging from
their secret empire after dusk gets duskier
We savor the summer rain's generous gift
of sweet corn Allapo grilled over charcoal
He tells us stories of a deprived childhood
and of a fair maiden born of privilege
How their disparate backgrounds drove
an impenetrable wedge between them,
He had to leave, his final memory of her
in tears, silently grieving their divorce
He marched barefoot to the direction of
Dreamland where- as he heard-
broken hearts could be pieced together
A miracle to him if it were to happen-
He thought then. It never did.

He learned to read and write – the price to
pay for a small taste of prosperity
Armed with the rudiments of ABC and 1-2-3,
he scaled heights and settled in the land beyond
the framework of his ancestors' imagination

Now his handsome face is wrinkled by time
And his gait is slowed down by years of labor
He exhorts his grandchildren to master
the ABC's and learn to count
"For your generation and those of the fruit of
your loins will gather their food not from the
Earth but from pen and paper, " he says like
a confident prophet whose visions have come true

His words do not sink in to minds born only yesterday
We just delight in listening to him and watching
his habit of rubbing his hand over his aquiline nose
Nature did not paste on our faces
For perhaps we could not carry it with grace
as we do the small ones She saw fit to bestow on us
Nothing in the world is quite as festive as gathering
around a fire, gobbling up corn that never runs out,
listening to Allapo recall his dark nights and bright days

He is now in the Great Beyond.
I hold a pen and scribble it on paper
for my next meal and those of my children
There is a presence in the room,
In my mind's eye, I see a wrinkled face
made more handsome by an encouraging
smile, watching me

And I keep writing.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Reproaching Abraham

'Abraham built an altar and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.'

From the Book of Genesis

□

If God did not stop you, Isaac would have died
like a promising sunflower nipped in the bud
The Jews would be tracing their genealogy through
another bloodline (but that is another story)
How would you have felt the moment, days,
months, or years after the slaughter?
The sound of a boy's voice would send shivers down
your spine, plague your dreams at night, steal your
strength by day. You would forget your own name.
For reason would forsake you every time the
sun illuminates the entire face of the moon.
Heavenly bodies would rule your moods and vision
Mothers would scoff at the womb that bore you
and harbor no pity at the sight of your big body
wandering shorn of direction and a mind, like a
weightless papyrus litter drifting on the Nile.

To agree to stain your hands with the blood of your blood,
the bone of your bone, flesh of your flesh –
Is this not perversity more heinous than Cain's?
I want to know, because the storyteller omitted it-
Did you make Isaac prepare his own deathbed?
With the total faith of a child in his father, he must
have obeyed you, for a father's parricidal design
is too large a vice to reside in a child's small mind
He must have sprinted away, happy to please his
father -for he was one fine boy - and gathered
every kindling, every twig his frail arms could.
An innocent tiny boy building his own funeral pyre
Is a thought my mind cannot welcome. Yet,
it keeps intruding. Is it the mother I am or the child within?

Isaac's breath was Sarah's near-impossible dream.

How many summers came and went that she longed
to nurture your seed in her ovary for nine months?
You heard her wail to the heavens. Every dropp of her
tear was like a slit in your heart for you loved her.
You lost count of the animals she burnt to placate
The One who could make a cradle of her gentle arms.
Her spirit was resilient until she stopped going to the
Red Tent; blood stopped flowing between her legs
God loves the womb-for through it life multiplies itself.
Says the story teller, He granted Sarah's lifelong prayer
Without second thought, you were willing to smother it!

My ancestors worshipped yours and Sarah's God
They called him Kabunian, the God of Reason
the God of Truth and Justice, the God of Love
the Great Defender of the weak, like children
He would have listened if you argued your son's case
You pleaded for Sodom even if it cared not for refugees,
and begged God not to breathe His wrath upon it
(and for this, I am your admirer, however it may look)
Where was your voice when He said, "Slay your son! "?

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Resistance

My forebears carved rice terraces
from the foot of mountains
In the wooded apex, they plucked berries
Swapped stories of children's betrothal
And antics of precocious grandchildren
They sowed seeds and more seeds
For the future thousands of years ahead
Pledged by the bulges in women's bellies
The shrill cry smile of a newborn babe
The frantic scream of countless fawns
Skittering through the dense backwoods
Hungry for their mothers' breasts
Amid the smell of clean, fresh air

The white men came with their guns
My forebears spilt the white men's blood
On the land that breathed their life
With blood, they watered their dream
That their future would one day arrive
No gun could erase their bloodline

You came with your promise of jobs,
Of civilization, of candies and easy life
But life was easy before your kind came
The last frontier you see here is not ours
To bargain away to insatiable greed
We loaned it from our children
As our forebears did from us

We cannot betray our forebears' dreams
The lies of your greed are worse than guns
The thick shadow of your deception
Is cast on our history, evident in our hunger
The destruction of our burial grounds
The muted cries of our ancestors' ghosts

Your lies will end our lives, erase our future

Blood is the color of our determination

Our history will not die with your lies
Do not force us to paint this land

with your blood

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Retribution

I was a caller when your forebears
celebrated the matrimony of two people
I joined their steadfast adjuration for a
blissful and abundant life for the couple.
I listened to their profound colloquy
on the perpetuation of the human race
through some bustle in the dark of night.
I was the blithe breeze that fanned their
exultation radiating across the tribe,
enthusiastic to receive the promise
of the preservation of their bloodline.

I was a caller when your forebears
welcomed the advent of a newborn.
I swayed as they pirouetted for elation
A child presaged vast hope for the tribe.
I smiled as they importuned the Unseen
for a life full of justice for the neonate.
I joined their jubilation and heard them
as they marveled at the miracle of life -
that it could begin with an infant so tiny.
I was the cool rain that watered the land.
I provided life to the grains that nourished
the child to manhood, future of his people.

I was a caller when your forebears
bemoaned the passing away of one of them.
I felt their hearts shatter into tiny fragments
not quite comprehending that someone so
good would have a brief sojourn on earth.
I wailed as they wailed and begged the
heavens to accept the soul of the deceased.
I cupped my hands and gathered their tears;
I drank the saline water to fathom Sorrow.
I was the ground they consigned the body
to till it compounded with the parched earth
and endowed life to the green gone brown.

I was there from the beginning with them

I am not One of You; you do not know me.
The colonizers and their conspirators among
you have gouged your eyes: you are blind to
my body's lacerations, source of abysmal pain.
They have broken your ears: you do not hear
my cries coming from the bowels of my being.
You embraced Deception and banished Truth.
I am now what you have made me become.

I am the River powerless to appease thirst,
become a black swimming pool for debris,
deathbed of fishes and mollusks, your food.
I am the dreary Air that smothers Breath.
I blend with contagion from your factories
and cars, strewing Death into your bodies.
I am the greasy Sea impotent to harbor Life,
a pit for your plastic bags and metal junk.
I am the Mountain unable to produce aliment.
You made me bald and frail: I erode at times
burying thousands as they plead for their lives.

I am Forgotten: you have made me your foe.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Salt On Wound

When nature liberated its anger
its air stream unbridled its muscle
scattering leaves to all directions
deracinating life-giving verdure
Some plants were robbed of life on
the soil of their birth and youth
Others were swept to faraway
shores where they withered away
or struggled to reclaim animation.

Such is the blight of poverty you
nurture like a favorite pet in this
land you call your principality
It flings your people to the globe's far
corners ramming them out of their homes,
away from their spouses' embrace
You have orphaned the children
while their parents are still alive
Babies who yearn for a mother's touch
grow up suddenly in the night; in the
morrow, they are acquainted with life's
harshness forbidden in an infant's world
The cradle has abruptly shrank for them.
Homes have been shattered into minute
slivers they could not be pieced together.

There you are- counting the gold
wired to your kingdom's coffers and
your elation reverberates throughout
the archipelago taunting loneliness and despair.
You ridicule the tears of the mothers as
they slave on foreign shores for the stomach
ignoring the yearnings of the heart.
You jeer at the anguish of the father
who has not witnessed the birth of his daughter
and her metamorphosis into womanhood.

Why do you call them heroes
when they are your victims?

☐2 June 1996

Background: During the administration of Fidel V. Ramos as President of the Philippines, he hailed the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) as New Heroes. Their dollar remittances were significantly helping keep the Philippine economy afloat.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Seasons Of Cautious Amour

Across the humid air
we swapped
reluctant smiles
You asked me
my name

Diffidence slipped to ease
when leaves
were a riot of colors
and they were falling
on our shoes trudging
unknown roads
Together, we explored
dark alleys, strange nooks
You kept me from
falling off ravines
And I kept you from
bumping into dead-ends
of walled opportunities

We were bridged
to each other
when whiteness
buried the landscape
and iridescence was sucked in
by cinereal aura
Your arms around me
routed the glacial air
But our laughter was
not for the world to hear

As the crocus struggled
against dormancy
and inched its way
to bring shades to the ground
and the tulips of all shades
conquered the ambience
Our closeness bloomed
like the cherry efflorescing,

its blush of pink
alert with gentle rain,
too loud to contain a secret

The humid air returned
We stood admiring the trees
basking in the sun
and the innocent fragrance
of roses in the wind
I was looking forward
to better tomorrows
The world's eyes found
a new fixation

Earth drew
an almost full circle
I had reasons to stretch
the space between us
But they were the same reasons
why I stayed in the hook
of your arms
It was déjà vu
when
we crossed a river to see
what was on the other side
and found what we left

I was smelling the alyssum
when you started talking
about a future
That was when
I chose
solitude
over your company

Lest you forgot,
the rainbow is our flag
Forbidden
Scorned
Unknown to law
Castles in the air
have to be deserted

before they crash□

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Swan Song

(For Diana who made the right decision)

The past is just behind us as it ambulates with narrow
gaits while the morrow waves in the far, far distance.
My mind wrestles, in vain, against memories of a heart
hitched to another by that ancient tie called romance,
speaking a language fathomed only by those who love purely,
denounced as obscene by the bigoted magistrate of decency.
Each of us was bound to other people by legal cords, like
death-row inmates to whom liberty is a desperate entreaty.

We lived in a world where seeking one's bliss was immorality.
Putting up a charade in a hollow union was a priceless virtue.
How many more of the world's billion people ached as we did,
who cried over a duplicitous culture that they could not subdue?
Ours was a story of a nourished thicket of imperishable love
bearing a farfetched resemblance to disparaged debauchery.
Two souls claimed fair shares of halcyon contentment, publicly
condemned as self-seeking by the imposing edifice of morality.

Like sturdy bushes of weeds in a wide bed of pink roses,
interlopers invaded our world and made it too narrow.
Fingers pointed at us, thorns of judgment had stuck out,
they shot at us and we collapsed like a fallen sparrow.
You reached for me as a soldier in war to a comrade
I whispered to your ears but I didn't recognize my voice,
I never thought my lips would utter the lonely word to you
But, forgive me, the law of scruples gave me no choice-

Goodbye...

29 November 2004

□

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

The Plagues Only Solidarity Can Quash

We gather round
for lies have been sown
on fecund fields of innocence
They will sprout into evergreen trees
If we do not gather

We dared say the sky is blue
They say it is red, the color of blood
It is black, the color of terror
We dared say one and one equal two
They say a million
Give or take a few
To prove their point, they come down to us
With their arrogance printed on that
paper exalting Falsehood

This is the curse
That Truth can quash

We gather round
for the door to seal the cage
of thought is almost complete
We will be trapped inside
If we do not gather

We wondered loudly why the very few abide
in palaces and the rest inside Baguio Oil cans
They say "Choose- destiny or misfortune;
Indolence or hard work"
We dared complain that the innocent suffer,
the guilty are blessed
They say paranoia has been a scourge
since the dawn of civilization
As paranoia fueled barbarism,
it foments rebellion and terrorism
Neutralize the noise of barbarians/rebels
With that paper dignifying Silence

This is the plague

That Freedom can quash

We gather round
for the ink on our death warrant
is about to dry
It will dry
if we do not gather

We dared taunt them for their inability to tell
man or woman from quadruped,
They say biology fundamentals evolved
And how can we forget that immutable law
The lord of the manor has divine license to
shoot at beasts sowing chaos in his estate?
We dared ask why counting bodies on the streets
is a task never done like a woman's work
They say our calculator is counterfeit or obsolete
We dared demand to see the disappeared
They say we have gone to the wrong information booth
They wave at us the paper that watered down
debauchery in murder, celebrating Death

This is the plague
That Life can quash

We gather round, we gather round
Before we believe
The graves are a lie
or
themes of literary works of fiction

Before we believe
Our thoughts are a figment of our imagination
or
Insanity in a clever disguise

Before we believe
that the broken bones
of our parents
of our siblings
of our children
are of chimpanzees

Before we stop chanting

Justice is not a squatter on earth
deserving eviction
Equity is not a vice
Disparity is not virtue

Before respiration becomes
mere proof of existence
not of animation

Before

Truth will be swallowed by Falsehood
Freedom will be caged in Silence
Life will be buried under Death

Only Solidarity can quash the plagues.

We gather round.

(In the year 2007, the Philippine government passed the Human Security Act, a law widely perceived to quash political dissent. Thailand also passed its own the same year. These actions were in support of the US Bush administration's global war on 'terror.' Sadly, no one could pass a law to stop state terrorism and US' global terrorism.)

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

The Suitor

One hand knocks on a bolted door,
the other cradles his big dream
Hopeful he stands as a harbor waits
For a ship that wandered upstream
Minutes slowly drench the time
Till they mature into long hours
The rain its sadness in its prime
Surrenders and lavishly pours
The flowers he holds boldly resist
Their wilting spirit in sympathy
Not even the numbing coldness
Could keep the young man away

His feet are floating on the stale air,
His faith has hit the bored moon
The brown earth, so long ignored
Fenced out his poised gaits so soon
Cupid sadly shakes his pretty head,
He flies to where there's little hope
He worries, in due course, someone
Will hang his despair from a rope
Oblivious, the man eagerly awaits
The musical sound of an opening door
But a girl inside made up her mind
He'll writhe in pain from a heart-sore

(24 March 1989)

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

The Woman In A Lonely House

She lives in a house stripped of laughter
Its once gaudy yard shed its luster
Sadness moved in some long time ago
A lonely twist the world cannot know
Happiness left no trace of itself
Except in the photographs in the shelf
From time to time, nostalgia plucks them out
When the truth of joy she starts to doubt

She dances on the old boulevards
Where laughter was not extravagance
Remembering the dead mirth brings pleasure
In the midst of regrets beyond measure
She imagines dwelling in a house
Sans the quiet tears of a battered spouse
She mourns deceased goals, immense losses
Yet she stays and hangs from harsh crosses

The church, neighbors, even family
Say exodus is but debauchery
Ever since the beginning of time
Eve and her daughters had to bear grime
She fears society's stern rebuke
She hears it from the songs of a brook
The howling wind commands her to stay
The open gate stands to block her way.

The mistress seems to have lost her mind
Her sanity- who will help her find?
At night, facing the full moon she dreams
Of happiness flowing in wide streams
Too the indulgent house where she lives
Finds distressing all her distraught spells
For dreams she stops from coming to life
Will not bail her out from ill and strife

But who are we to judge her cravenness
When we too pushed her in her abyss?
Our silence and blindness to her misery

Convicts us for her mammoth tragedy.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Through A Child's Eyes

I took this snapshot years ago for some fun
I remember you standing in the bright sun
Laughing, the sun's sparkle dancing in your hair
The camera failed to capture your flair
But my memory does. I was happy and sad
You lived in a perfect world; no room was bad
Life was a pliant slave to your every wish
Now, you are grown up. Concerned, you fish

Through truth and the truth to the sheltered's eyes
Underneath your world then were hidden lies
The masses-even infants are slaves to life
Their only choices- hunger or the knife
People die for lack of food. Helpless, we watch
Righteous anger drives us to light a match
So the world may see truths hidden by the night
For too long the powers ignored the wretched's plight

You are blest for you never went cold and hungry
Blest more you will be for fighting iniquity
Stay in the struggle until every child
Will have plenty like animals in the wild

(For Dinney)

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

To A Brother Moping Around Due To A Mistake

(for Rene)

Perhaps you were wrong last summer
But there are motley fortunes to gather

You spend your days lost in the garden,
In the midst of roses, your face is ashen
You ignore their beauty and sweet breath
They wilt; no doubt, stressed by your regret
Your thoughts have taken you to the past
Must you dwell there? Should your stay last?

Summer has come and gone like breeze
Tropical birds left for warm nesting trees
Frantic to escape the imminent rains
Awaited by parched rice fields in the plains
Like sages, birds know when they must go
For when the time is stale, fate will not flow

I have said angry words I cannot take back
Rocks cast on a wall can create a crack
But there's time for apology, to patch the wall
The beauty of time –it ceases not to crawl
The waiting morrow is a gift of a chance
To reverse the damage of a wrong dance

Only fools reside in moments long gone
Missteps and wrongs cannot be undone
To march to the future is for them who are alive
Dwellers in the past, of spirits are shrived
Death is not the end of breath but of the will
To travel with the sun, to reject a standstill

Time spent regretting how we blundered
Is precious time senselessly squandered
For, alas, the past cannot be dismantled
But a lesson on hindsight that must be learned
The past we leave; the future we must live
To its space and time, our efforts we give

Stranded in your guilt trip, in your sorrow,
How will you catch the bus to tomorrow?

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

To A Murderer Investigating Murder

And so you created a commission to
look into the senseless deaths of heroes
dispatched by the force of your might?
The grieving nation giggled at this one.
Did you hear the melancholic laughter?
Your concern mocks the pain of death.
It slanders the sorrow of the orphaned
It slurs the heartache of the widowed.
It burlesques the outrage of the nation.

You were the one who pulled the trigger.
Nakedly, you spattered fresh blood on
the unsullied walls of the churches and
the hospitals and the homes and the
schools and the faces of the innocent.
You did it once and again and again.
Your power's conscience is frozen.
The edifice of truth shudders from the
white tales squirting from your tongue.

Even the ground on which the bodies
have fallen wince from the force of the
butchery by your bloodstained hands.
Even the gun you exploited to display
your dearth of respect for life shudders
from the despicability of your vice.
Even the lady of justice has doffed her
blindfold to let the mighty stream of
her sorrow cascade; the magnitude of
your crime has slowed down her grind.

And you now investigate your own crime?
I beg of you: Please stop this madness!
Defile not a corpse with crocodile tears!
Polish not the nation's lesions with salt!
May God forgive you; the nation cannot!

(Under the administration of Gloria Arroyo in the Philippines, many activists,
lawyers and journalists were either murdered or made to disappear. In 2006,

Arroyo created a commission to look into the extra-judicial killings. Subsequently, Prof. Phillip Alston, the UN Special Rapporteur on Summary and Extrajudicial Killings came to the Philippines to investigate. His findings showed that the government was responsible for the killings and disappearances.)

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

To A People's Warrior Returning To Battle

The clarion call sounded; You are not ours
Despair's hope owns you. You stand before us
Carrying all you own in a battered backpack
Well-worn clothes and your dream that the cries
Of penury in the masses' favela will sojourn
The yield of peasants' sweat will fill their plate
Mothers in an infinite line of mothers will stop
Burying sons and daughters in an eternal line
Of sons and daughters who perished while passing
Through the less-traveled road you keep treading
With resolute gait, overriding humps and thorns
Our solace is the road you took is the right one
No one gets lost; the road is light to dark paths

You leave us clinging to the dreams you take
For our desperate hopes mirror your own
Off to the far edge you go beyond this line
Across the landscape, hidden by dark clouds
Or, at times, by blinding rays of sinister light
With eagerness, there wait promise of safety
Blending artlessly with the threat of danger,
like a dropp of rain in a barrel of oil
Hope claimed you; your death is its sorrow
But a mother's fear for your life is so heavy
That the promise of survival seems light in it
Who knows? You chose a life of uncertainty
For aspirations as certain as the light of day

Our words stammer through unsaid goodbyes
Later, we will stand on the veranda and wave
Till your figure disappears with the dusty road
For the moment let me hold you tight, so tight
It may be our last touch, before your final war.

For K. Ole

26 October 2006-

To A Twelve Year-Old Child

-A 12-year-old girl, who became despondent over her family's poverty, hanged herself inside their makeshift house a day after her father told her he could not give her the P100 she needed for a school project.

-The government is taking responsibility for a 12-year-old girl who took her life because of extreme poverty but assured that steps are being taken to ease hunger and poverty, officials said on Thursday.

ENews reports of The Philippine Daily Inquirer,2007

The deep shadows that enveloped your home
And never retreated since you were born
Became the light that illuminated your mind.

I sorrow for your death, my dear child
Your mother's milk on your lips barely dried
And she is not tired from singing cradlesongs
I did not tell you that there is life...still
There is life beyond a pad paper and a pencil
that fathers forced into shameful indolence
could not purchase, even with their blood
This world did not demand heroism from
someone so tender and innocent as you
Because it owed you; you did not owe it.

I sorrow for your death, my dear child
But I must release the black garb soon
for your small grave is a large gift
to every cold, famished child like you
An intensely brilliant light for a world
that is too dark; yes, too disgracefully dark
for the blindingly clear sparks and lightning
emitted by charged voices hoarse from
traveling too much space in too much time
You are the voice of the unheeded loud voices.

Your grave is the commanding energy
that will rouse a nation groping in the dark

for its soul fatigued from hopelessness,
broken promises and aimless wandering
Resigned to a fate worse than death
For there is no hunger in the cemetery,
not even cold, in spite of its glacial ambiance
Your corpse is the chance at redemption
of them that wear the crown but never
rode the horse to the unspeakable places
where every human blight celebrates
victory handed on a silver platter by the enemy.

I sorrow for your death
It is one death too many
the death of a million children
that should end with your death
But I will not slur your sacrifice
The tears that flow are an amalgam
of crushing grief and a song of hope.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

To The Children Of Sweat

I dig gold from the earth's deep womb
Make fabrics for the bourgeois room
Work the fields for the wealthy's food
Tonsure forests for mansion wood
Nameless and insignificant
I have no status. Just two hands
Without power. Without a choice
Defenseless. Tired. Without a voice

The landlord has me in his hold
His sacks rupture with loads of gold
His belly bloats from what I sow
My own stomach, no food does go
Mocking my thirst, he swims in wine
I am a slave! My sweat's not mine.
A beast - I toil and sweat all day
Shortchanged, I get no decent pay

Abuse chains me. I am not free
Naked. Stripped of my dignity
The stinging cold I have to bear
The deep tunnel I must not fear
The angry sun scorches my skin
Children must eat. I can't complain
A mighty blow fractures my back
Faint, I won't survive such attack
One person standing firm alone
Yields to the power of the throne

But there is strength in unity
An escape route from slavery
Ten lashes - no matter how strong
Can't crack the ribcage of a throng
The masters say we cannot form
Organizations that can doom
Their lust for more power and wealth
But it's a lie, it's said in stealth

Fellow workers, we gather round

Steadfast. Run! Then we hold our ground
We've been hungry; what's more of it
As long as we'll soon reap our feat?
Exploitation must meet its end
So hunger will not rule the land
We, proletarians, claim our name!
Assert our pride! Erase our shame!

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Too Late

I celebrated songs for years
Of the sea ringing in my ears
As I waited for your return
I never thought Faith you would burn
What was there on the other shore
That made our distance stretch some more?
I had to find out from a friend
You got married; that was our end

You called, pleading for forgiveness
I was too hardened by the mess
I said that with finality
Perdition was your destiny
Mammoth pain progressed to anger
I cast happiness to the fire
Like ice disdained by summer heat
My heart simply refused to beat

I could not recapture laughter
Such as we had, with another
Because I could not trust it then
It was heartbreak soon to happen
To feel joy was to forgive you
For deceit, such grace was not due
Solitude was my one comfort
No peace could come from any port

I welcomed and nurtured silence
Bolted all the doors of release
I would not even say your name
It was invocation for pain
Cradling hate in my heart for years
I fiercely battled against tears
And never let them stain my face
Who were you to conquer my days?

I am now old, wrinkled by age
Mellowed by time, I plunked my rage
Now I sit by my cold window

I bear so profound a sorrow
I count the drops of pelting rain
I wish I could escape this pain
How can I ever let you know
Hatred is gone; I forgive you?

Over the phone, your wife told me
You died at 5 AM today.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Touring Bratislava

I am
without my name...
alone with my shadow
in a crowd of people
also nameless to me

unlike their cameras-
Nikon, Sony, Olympus, Canon-
capturing the charm
of a city, its neoteric dash
merging gracefully

with its antediluvian air:
Baroque palaces and a diner
that gyrates with graceful speed
like the small hand of a clock,
a Gothic castle perched on a hill

overlooking the serene Danube
crossed by a new bridge
with an edifice contrived earlier
than its time
No one perhaps missed Cumil

who mischievously bobbed up
through a manhole cover
after a day's backbreaking labor
in the underground sewer
his nostrils escaping the noxious blend

of the city's motley stinks
We all must have met Naci
taking his hat off to everyone
How sagacious of him to elude
the contretemps of the world

by renouncing
what we all struggle to keep:
the mind

And The Paparazzi peeping through
a camera; he has never been
a scandalmonger nor tattler
On the contrary, he is routinely
mercilessly harassed, his image
stolen by lenses of curious strangers
The city is a riot of cynosures

People talk all at once
Like the chirping of birds,
the sounds mean nothing to me
But the shared gasps of awe
are eloquent speech

Souls connect
breathing in the same magnificence
that tomorrow shall be shared memories
of people who will never know
each other's names.

Bratislava/17July2010

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Tribute To A Slayer

He was the man of the hour
as he stood in the gallery of supremacy
beside the queen.

He had spilled blood
inundating the kingdom
seeping through every door
driving a spate of fear
through every human heart
to the delight of the queen.

The slayer flaunted the bayonet
smeared with fresh plasma
and the desiccated gore
of the women and men who trod the
path of righteousness on a mission
to end inequity,
slain that others may live.

Mothers and fathers buried their sons and daughters
sons and daughters buried their fathers and mothers
while wives buried their husbands
and husbands buried their wives
as the queen adorned the slayer with laurels
and crooned his praises
the sycophants hummed the tune
they lifted the lid of the chest to let out
gold for more bayonets
to plunge into the heart of every man and woman
who sang a different tune.
'Long live the reign of terror! '
the singing went on
amidst the wails of orphans and the sickened
admonition of the world

A thousand innocent person's death is a man's glory
and a kingdom's accomplishment report
the cries of the orphans and widows,
a man's swan song and

a queen's inspirational hymn.

One day the kingdom will fall
and the children of lesser gods
will ascend the throne of power
and they will have their fill of justice and freedom
to every one according to need
from everyone according to ability.

4 July 2006

(During the 2006 state of the nation address, a yearly event when the Philippine president advises Congress on the state of the country to serve as bases for legislative agenda, Gloria Arroyo sang the praises of a General widely known as The Butcher for his brutal slaying of political dissidents.)

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Vanishing

We are part of the crowd; we bear their names:
John, Frank, Catherine, Leandro, Bernard,
Rick, Bettina, Dinah, Eden, Carmen, Aida
Our first names do not link us to our history,
Not to barely known legends we are forgetting
Not to the bloodline we would rather forswear
Even with long spears, savagery cannot touch us
We are one with the crowd for we are civilized
Without funny accent, we speak its language
We do not exchange words with our ancestors
Their strange tongue is way outside our grasp
Nature shares their jargon; Nature is alien to us

We are no longer savages. We have new eyes
We see gold swimming in our rivers and lakes
We watch as the soul of our past is drowning
And the spirit of avarice rules our moods
We reach for money deep into the earth's core
Like a speculum lacerating a woman's soul
Nonstop, we fell trees upon trees upon trees
Our eyes cannot see the anguishing spirits
How do you spot someone you know not?
Beyond our range of vision are the footprints
Of old on the remaining waters and lands
To pavements leading to truth, justice, equity

Our primitive ancestors ate from one plate
Now we seal our pots to bar even kith and kin
There is nothing to give out; there is nothing
Gone are the rice fields, the hunting grounds
Where hunger could not survive; it never could
Paper sealed by the government fenced us out
Of the vast lands that suckled our ancestors,
Cradled their bones, sipped their aged blood
We have gone to the mines, the hospitals,
The sweat shops, the offices with wing chairs
Even to places our forebears never imagined
Slash-and-burn tilling is buried with the past
We are now employees, sometimes slaves

From time to time, we endure hunger pangs

We are no longer savages, we have refined ears
We listen to the thumping noise in the airwaves
And get sucked up by violence and depravity
Our ears ignore the legends of truth and courage,
The words of wisdom echoing from the rippling
Of ancient rivers colored by civilization's fruits
We are deaf to the cricket choir's melodies at night
Or the tender voices rustling through the trees,
Or the harrowing cries from dying springs,
Or the caveat of a leaf leisurely falling from a tree,
Of a tiny ant carrying a morsel of rice on its back,
Or sunflower petals undulating in the soft breeze
We do not hear the ululation of hungry neighbors
Their curse is not ours; our blessing is not theirs
For we are no longer savages; not savages, at last.

We are no longer savages; our tastes are refined
We sip red wine, white wine, cabernet, whiskey
Sparkling like reeking urine in crystal glasses
Fabricated after agitating Nature till it slumped
We do not drink tapuy from coconut shell bowls
In the ommong, * we serve lechon** besides pinikpikan***
We shed off the loincloth, we gave up the gibey****
We wear underwear under well-tailored suits,
On our skin we rub lotion to keep it soft, supple
We spray perfume to simulate flower's fragrance
But we cannot mask the stench of evil in the air
We ditched the pasiking***** for briefcases and bags
We blend well with the crowd; who will say
Our ancestors were head-hunting savages?
With lips painted red, we are bold to tell lies
Eyes shielded by ornate shades, we do not see
Our way in the wide, tapered cleavage between
Despair and injustice, poverty and avarice

We have been uprooted from the vast land
Of our forebears' births, lives and deaths
For we abandoned barbarism for civilization
We dropped bolos and spears for guns and bombs
We stopped killing in defense of land, honor, life

Now we murder for lust, greed, power, status

Anxious to surface
From the cocoon of cultural bigotry
We are a new people
We are civilized.

We are

Vanishing.

*Ommong is the communal feast of some indigenous peoples in Northern Luzon of the Philippines.

**Lechon is a whole pork roasted over slow fire, which is a delicacy of Filipinos belonging to the majority culture

***Pinikpikan is a chicken recipe. The chicken is slowly beaten to death, then its feathers burnt and removed from the body, before the chicken is chopped into pieces and boiled.

****Gibey is a traditional costume of indigenous women in Northern Philippines.

*****Pasiking is a traditional backpack made of rattan.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Vicarious Experience

(While Watching Coffee Prince*)

She feels love in just a touch, in every stare
Even in every thought of the woman and man

The pirated digital video disk gets stuck-
She ran it, ran it so many, many times-
The image of the lovers sharing a smile
Is frozen like a large colorful still picture
Slowly, she shuts her eyes, sees beyond
Derision has been disguising as laughter
The silence between has become too wide
Arresting the space for hope, second chances
Absence no longer makes the heart yearn
It gives breathing space a lease in solitude
The door opens, a figure dominates the room
She pushes the remote control's power button
The television screen turns deathly black
He need not know that her hollow, prosaic life
Draws color and joy from a television screen.

She remembers how much they had and lost
These days, his baritone voice comes shadowed
On the air, overwhelmed by his betrayals
The lies in his words obscure his messages
Her memories of their good times mingle
Drearly with thick smoke masking his figure
As, like a tourist in a crowded shopping mall,
He passes her by nay a stare, nay a word
Till his figure disappears behind a narra door
Now a complete stranger in her pallid world
Like a weary traveler frantic for a dropp of water,
She pushes a button; the television comes to life
For some tangled moment, she loses herself
In a certain world once his and hers, once theirs
Secretly, she gaily basks in its luster and light

Hoping they will go back to that place
Hoping it will endure for others, at least.

*Korean telenovela that became very popular in the Philippines.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Waiting For Death

The
pain
slowly
arrives
with shallow
savagery
Then deeply plunges jagged claymore to my knee

How long must I endure unforgiving needles?
In dreams obscured shadows pass me by like riddles
Methinks they are angels of death spying on me
Perhaps curious to know if I'm fighting or ready
Sometimes, pain pilfers reason from the open wound
Plants bleakness that within surrender is cocooned
Like secrets buried deep under some unmarked tree
Their solitude the salvation that sets them free
Frantic with flagging nerves, I wait for peace alone
Willing release from pain poking at every bone

When my tears are settled and hardened on the floor
Suppliant, I sit for
Death to
rip open
the wide
door.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Warning To A Career Woman Considering A Domestic Shift

There are soiled plates, dark pots and pans
Her hands, not her head, should do the dance
She is often told her estate is not the thought
Conceding, her life, with misery, is fraught

He claims the privilege of a working mind
She retreats to matters of the menial kind
The economy is banned from her concerns
Her demesne the kitchen; lest his steak burns

Ignorance is bliss, but even bliss is a curse
When it detaches her far from the purse
Once go her clutches on the golden coins
She forfeits her voice in the decisions

An erstwhile busy mind that restrains thought
Slows down as engine blighted by rust
Till power is lost, the car sapped of oil
Tendrilled weeds grow cramped into a coil

An empty mind is madness' playground
No sterile room where evil cannot be found
The color of the absence of imagination
A blank stare, an idiotic comment or confusion.

Yet if the kitchen be her conscious choice
By all means, we should listen to her voice
But her head- she must not let it retire soon
So she can distinguish herself from the spoon

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Warning To Tyrants

Cut off our tongue because through it
You become deaf to the injustice
You cannot hear what is being said
How can you hear what is not?
But the language of silence is a venom
Nature abhors a vacuum
It will fill the silence with noise
That will penetrate your deafness and
consume your soul weighed down by hatred
Till it evaporates into useless ash

Ascend your ivory towers
Arms folded, stand against a milieu of grandeur
Raise the trident so stillness will reign
Watch us with hawk's eyes
Eager to witness our fall with a move we make
But you will jump from your verandahs
When stillness will wave its hand
Metamorphose into Freedom that inflates
The sizes of small people
Whose massive force will pull you down

Push the button on the gas chamber
Let the bullets from your armaments fall
Like harsh monsoon rain
Let the grenade explode into splinters as many
as the untruths let loose by your tongue
and the wrecked aspirations of the masses
Let the mass slaughter continue
Every day is an open-game season
Extend the parameters of the mass graves
So that they can swallow more dead bodies

Heroes will fall proclaiming that Life is a wheel
on its axis; what goes up comes down,
what comes down goes up
This is not a thought
Rather, a conclusion of thought
From the matter surrounding it

The heroes' last rational thought will be of
the air you breathe poisoned by your paranoia
It is not a curse; it is nature registering
Itself in the mind of those about to collapse

I wonder, do you know

Tyranny
ends
for
the
dead?

It will continue to haunt those who live.

(In the year 2007, the Philippines and Thailand passed their respective human security laws purportedly to stop terrorism. The moves were however widely perceived to quash political dissension.)

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

We Have Not Fallen At All

(In memory of the victims of extrajudicial killings)

We are as leaves that have fallen
from puny twigs on a blustery day
Soon verdant leaves will bud
from the trunks of the hoary tree.
Such is how death becomes life.

Our blood streamed through vile holes
created by shells, into empty cups
of our weary comrades who drank as
thirsty athletes on a hot summer day
now eyes slanted towards the finish.

Our flesh putrefied into fecund ashes,
amalgamated with the parched earth.
A new plant eager for life will burgeon,
a moribund tree will be rejuvenated
on that spot nourished by our dust.

Our memory will suckle those who
will be born from our senseless death.

We have fallen but they will rise.
Then we have not fallen at all.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

When I Walk The Streets

Thoughts of you
Are always with me
Like the oxygen I breathe
Even when I do not notice it
Filling my lungs, giving me life
To face the next day
Crammed with desperation
As yesterday.

I walk the street
I notice
A child holding out a begging bowl
A morsel from the last meal
Long ago forgotten
Has dried and sticks to the bowl surface
Like parched dirt on a white shirt
Good Samaritans drop
Their insignificant coins
Onto palms outstretched
Pleading for warmth and care
Women in skimpy skirts
Lean on doors to houses of vice
Inviting them whose full pockets
Will be emptied after a few hours
Of ephemeral happiness.

Sometimes I want to withdraw
From this hopelessness
But I think of you
And remember laughter
The plans for the future
The house with white ceilings
Two children and one dog
This life is not as desolate
As it seems
When I walk the streets.

(For V.A.)

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

While Silence Is Her Refuge

He crushed her being,
spat on her education,
raked her self-confidence
burned her plans
charted in the kitchen
where her work was never done.
Violence upon violence
visited her scar-ridden body
The pain so severe
she could not even scream.
Silence was her refuge.

Her wounds ran much deeper
than sisters could imagine
But she swam alone in the
sea of her nightmares and anguish
fears covered, cries stifled
Silence was her refuge.

The crowd had a million ears
but not one for the moans
of a sister's tortured soul
It taunted her for her questions
crucified her for her speech
Word of pain was infamy
The crowd rubbed salt on the
raw, bleeding wound
Since then, silence became her refuge

A daughter now does the work
that is never done
Her spirit protests not
numbed by her mother's death
and her own, for like her mother
she died a hundred deaths
and will die a hundred more
because silence is her refuge.

The crowd does not know

that silence betrays
The crowd itself has run
a million times
to silence for refuge
It still does.
When will the crowd realize
that silence is a foe?
It harbors violence
and squeezes the blood
that waters and keeps alive
the tree of death
that has eternal life
while silence is woman's refuge.

13 March 2000

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Who Will Gather Grass?

The ramshackle dap-ay is deathly cold, alone
Aching, waiting for young hands to harvest cogon
Its thatch is falling; soft rain flows through crevices
Sooty walls are decaying as a history recedes
No wise man to keep the fireplace smoldering
No boys with thin twigs, at aged soles scratching
While he tells legends of courage and rectitude
No assembly of sages to summon plenitude,
To unbridle from the olden spring of wisdom
Inspirations to honor equity, truth, freedom
Empty, but for termites munching its dark walls
Still but for the eerie silence of ghosts' footfalls

The dap-ay bred a people with morals now unheard
Water and grains from one's sweat must be shared
To squirrel food for gain was the presage of a fall
The grief and joy of one was the grief and joy of all
Hedges must be respected, so too life in any form
A good turn deserved no prize; it was but the norm
No wrong went unpunished lest it defamed the land
The tall scepter of power was raised with even hand
To allocate harvest, to stonewall greed, debauchery
Kabunian was praised for ubiquitous truth and equity
For every birth, union, sometimes even for death
Now on its frail, last leg, the dap-ay gasps for breath

Who will fix the thatch? The young are indisposed
By their dogged pursuit of education in the schools
Where they learn to be ashamed of their pedigree,
By their cry for justice whose wheels grind leisurely
In halls where truth may be no less a merchandise,
By their resolute search for God in bank accounts,
Or when empty, in churches that often to them tell
Their forebears' ways - what short, easy trails to hell
The grandparents are dying, too weak to hold a cane
Too tired to tell folktales to their blasé grandchildren
Who will gather grass, repair a culture's thatch?
Who will save the dap-ay, its falling glory catch?

(The dap-ay is a structure of the Kankanaeys -indigenous people in the Philippines- where the council of elders make decisions on a village's political and socio-economic concerns. In the early days, its roofing was cogon grass. These days, however, the existing dap-ays have tin roofs, which may signify the deterioration of the Kankanaey culture.)

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Why My Father Does Not Eat Camote

Like clockwork, the green fields transmogrified
Into harvest shining like gold same time each year
Bowls were filled to need (Greed was unthinkable)
Then came trespassers whose ways were strange
Bombs scattered terror; freedom ran to the fringes
Rice fields primed for plenitude became fallows

Routine was shattered; hunger, once a myth, reigned
But resilience can perforate the most solid rock
Inside the parched earth too petrified to nourish life
Camote flourished, a rush of flood drowning despair
They who were listlessly drifting to the end of days
Retraced their gaits, eager to live, to look ahead.

They ate camote
for breakfast
for lunch
for supper
Until the bombs stopped

Out of the caves, an uncircumcised lad emerged a man
Desperate to forget the horrors dripping from war's fangs
But they are always, always playing even in his aged mind.

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

You Left The Prints Of Your Shadows

(For Ratul and Nicole)

Fate found you where comfort is beached
It brought you to fountains of sorrow
You swam in the slimes of utter despair
And ate fish dried by the heat of poverty
I watched you lovingly spoon the rice
Harvested from fields watered by sweat
And the throbbing blood of tough dreams
We got lost in the dialectics of oppression
Lazily muffling the monotone of mosquitoes
I felt the weight of your shadow's grief
And heard it weeping under our laughter
You wondered how mirth thrives in tragedy

In vegetable gardens along mountain ridges
Hearts break from gluttony and exploitation
Easily soothed- even by a stranger's love
The peasants will still look to the age-old sun
For a small glimmer to illuminate the path
Of posterity searching for better tomorrows
Friends have come, friends have gone away
But there, your sympathy will be remembered
You, as other friends, left your shadows' prints
As you wiped beads of sweat from your brows
While lifting beans from the nadir of hunger
To the fragile platform of trifling, elusive hope

Your feet drag as you leave this dejected land
You are in its memory; it heard you pray for it
You left behind heavy prints of your shadows
And the rich echo of your cries and laughter
Blending with our summons for redemption
Luck has abandoned this land, but you will not
Now, you bear the weight of our portion
It will trail you like a determined sleuth
In the corners of opulence, in the sea of joy
When you measure hope against damnation
It will invade the warmth of your comfort

Luxury in the backdropp will trouble you

But such is fate; such is curse; such is luck
The happiness of hearts who love humanity
Is scourged with agony for the lesser worlds
We suffer. Once. Then again, and then again
Till our souls are purified, become beautiful
Let us keep the heavy prints of your shadows
While you embrace the burden of our dreams
Then we meet again, more beautiful than now.

(Ratul Bhattacharyya and Nicole Smith are young people from the First World who gave up the comforts of easy life to work among the poor and the depressed in the Philippines. 25 June 2008)

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot

Youth Interrupted

Like the delicate tumble of a dried leaf
On a soft, fragile mound of earth
The passing away of an old man
Inscribes no scar
A poignant sigh. Silence. Finally, peace.

When a young man gives up the ghost
It is like a boulder descending
On a floor made of fragile glass
The scattered splinters carve
terrible wounds beyond closure
Pleading for reason that won't show itself

No one recovers from the sorrow
Not even time itself
It will haunt the future
Forced to remember, to cry the tears of old
To echo the questions of a devastated age
To dread the reprise of a bewildering fate

Is it nature's revenge when time's course
Is stopped while at its journey's peak?

(Written on Che Guevara's death anniversary, 2005)

Cheryl L. DaytecYañgot