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ROBERT HAYDEN: A BAHAI POET

Introduction

Although Robert Hayden is widely acknowledged to be one of America's best Negro poets—if not the best—he has received relatively little critical attention and was not even widely known until the mid-Sixties, when the publication of his Selected Poems attracted a larger audience. Of this book Choice magazine had to say: "Selected Poems reveals the surest poetic talent of any Negro poet in America; more importantly it demonstrates a major talent and poetic coming-of-age without regard to race or creed. Whether he records his impressions of Mexico, or celebrates the quiet moments of personal life or the illumination that the Bahai faith has brought into his life, he writes with a stripped down and precise lyricism that lingers in the mind and echoes". (1)

Robert Hayden was born in Detroit, Michigan, on August 4, 1913, where he attended the public schools and, later, Wayne University. His early poetry, written in the 1930's, reflects the social consciousness of that time. From 1936 to 1938 he worked on a Federal Writers' Project, in charge of research into local black history and folklore. In 1938 he enrolled at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, where he won two Hopwood Awards for poetry, in 1938 and 1942. For a while he was music critic of the Michigan Chronicle, and a Rosenwald fellow in 1947. After graduating with an M.A. in English literature from Ann Arbor, he held various teaching posts, including two years at his alma mater (1944-46). In 1946, he was appointed associate professor of English at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. He stayed there until 1968, meanwhile having become professor of creative writing. From 1968 until his death in March 1980 he taught at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

His first book of poems appeared in 1940 (Heartshape in the Dust). At irregular intervals, others followed: The Lion and the Archer, with Myron O'Higgins, in 1948 (the title refers to their zodiac birthsigns; Hayden was a Leo); Figure of Time, in 1955; and A Ballad of Remembrance in 1962. This last book won the Grand Prix de la Poésie at the First World Festival of Negro Arts held in 1962 at Dakar, Senegal. There he was cited as "a remarkable craftsman, an outstanding singer of words, a striking thinker, a poète pur sang. He gives glory and dignity to America through deep attachment to the past, present and future of his race. Africa is in his soul, the world at large in his mind and heart."

fendi Press (Taunton, Massachusetts); 1978. Until his death in March 1980 Hayden was also poetry editor of *World Order*, the Baha'i magazine.

These collections are not always easy to obtain; the publisher of *Selected Poems and Words in the Mourning Time*, October House, has gone out of business; *The Night-Blooming Cereus*, a volume of only 16 pages, was published in London in a limited edition; and *American Journal* was issued by Fendi Press in a limited edition of one hundred hard-bound and one thousand paperbound copies. Fortunately, *Angle of Ascent* reprints most of Hayden's best work from the earlier volumes, and is still in print by a major publisher. The following chapters will refer mainly to the poems in this volume, supplementing them from time to time with verses found in the other books.

Hayden traveled extensively around the United States, reading his own poems. His readings were always popular, and took him to such places as the Library of Congress, Oberlin College, Lincoln University, Jackson College, Mexico City College, Beloit College, Pennsylvania State University, Lehigh University, the University of Washington in Seattle, the University of Louisville, and many others. Hayden's output was small but compressed. He was an obsessive craftsman, revising and polishing his poems until they shone. He strained to find the right word to express, in every case, his precise meaning. It is therefore difficult to find, among his published works, a really bad poem. Even the ones that he excluded from later collections have a perfection of form and language that makes them memorable. His images always have the quality of inevitability about them, so that one is moved to say that that is just the right image for the context. Likewise, his language has a lucidity and emotional clarity that seem, somehow, almost more French than English. And like Wallace Stevens, Hayden enjoyed the sound and imagery of outlandish words, certain of which recur in his poems: plangent (and its adjective plangent), lunar, grotesque, bizarre, imminence, juju, juba, quondam, burgeon, sinuous, ensorcelled, etc. His vocabulary is at times like a garden of exotic plants exaling strong but powerfully blended perfumes.

Hayden, despite his late success, remained a very insecure and deeply suffering man, retiring and shy, full of tension. His fears were many, from a literal fear of flying—he would only take a plane if forced to by the pressure of time—to a fear of dying. Though a very loving person, he could never resolve his own personal torment, caused by the conflict between his moral principles and religious aspirations and his strong physical lust, which was not only, in his terms, sinful, but, in society's eyes, deviant as well.

Hayden suffered a good deal from ill-health. His eyes were bad and he wore thick lenses. In his last years he spent much time in hospital, under treatment, among other things, for his nerves. For years he saw a psychiatrist regularly. In short, he knew the parabola of spiritual torment so characteristic of modern American poets from Hart Crane to Lowell.

In his last book, Hayden came closer than ever before to dealing
directly, and without veils, with his own experience and problems. He was never a confessional poet, though personal experience lies behind most of his work—transformed into moments of eternal meaning in his verse. It is true of his poetry that there is indeed nothing superfluous, nothing lacking. The purity of the feeling finds expression in a translucent language that never becomes mere rhetoric (though, to be sure, Hayden was a master in the use of rhetorical devices).

If there is a common theme in the most recent poems—the new poems in Angle of Ascent as well as American Journal—it is the search for, and appreciation of his roots: his poetic roots (Phyllis Wheatley, Paul Lawrence Dunbar), his personal roots (in "Beginnings", "Elegies for Paradise Valley", and "Names"), his historical and racial roots as a black ("Two Egyptian Portrait Masks", "Crispus Attacks", "The Islands"), and his roots as an American ("American Journal"). To all this he added his inquiring, religious attitudes toward life—the posture of bewildered reverence before the infinite, the unknowable, the unnameable. Though, perhaps, Hayden never resolved any of his personal or metaphysical conundrums, or eliminated the sources of his creative tension—his last poems still show him groping for answers—he has bequeathed us a significant gift of love for his fellow man. It is no accident that his last published poem is entitled "The Year of the Child" (2)—a poem for his grandson, full of hope and promise.
NOTES

(1) Quoted from the back cover of Selected Poems (New York: October House, 1966).

(2) Published in World Order, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Summer 1979), pp. 44-5.
When one is confronted with a new author, it is legitimate to ask why one should trouble to read him. By "new", here I mean simply unfamiliar to the reader. If the purpose of reading is to acquire new knowledge or insights or have new experiences, i.e. to feel new feelings or to feel old ones in unfamiliar ways—in short, to expand the range of one's intellect and emotions—it is then only common sense to ask what kind of enrichment of experience a new author is likely to give. No author, old or new, is likely to stimulate interest for long if there is nothing peculiarly his in his work which differentiates it clearly and distinctly from all other work in a similar form, or on a similar theme. What is unique about an author is what is called his 'originality', and is in no way incompatible with adherence to a tradition.

So much may seem obvious. But originality is easy to spot in the case of macroscopic deviations from established form, as in the case of Whitman; it is far harder to pinpoint in work of high quality which yet, formally, seems to conform to contemporary poetic practice without deviation. Such were my first impressions, years ago, on first reading the poetry of Robert Hayden. I realized that I was in the presence of a fine spirit and an able poet, a master of his craft. I was not yet aware of the quality which made him truly outstanding.

This quality is, I suggest, nothing less than the careful and precise exploration, in verse of great artistry and resonance, of a unique sensibility, unlike any in earlier American letters. It is a sensibility which combines in a rare synthesis the four main existential "problems" of Hayden's life: sex, religion, blackness, and art. These four components may be regarded for our purposes as all equally important. On the existential level, it is significant that each of these components involves a deviation from the norm of American society, in the choice of a different experience of sexuality, of a minority (and uninherit ed) religion, of a dedication to art, and the fate of a different color. These are all sources of tension. Moreover, they create further tension by their interaction: the professed morality conflicts with the sexual tensions, the religious and social ideology is at odds with black political action, etc. Only art succeeds in creating a fragile balance.

The element which seems to cause the most tension is religion; hence one would expect it to call forth ambivalent reactions. Likewise, it may well be a source of creative energy. I here propose, therefore, to explore the thematic development in Hayden's treatment of religion.

Such treatment may be explicit or implicit. It is explicit in a number of poems which are almost propaganda pieces, or would be if they were not fine poems: "Baha'u'llah in the Garden of Ridwan," "From the Corpse Woodpiles, from the Ashes," "Dawnbreaker," "and all the atoms cry aloud." (1) It is, however, implicit in a number of others, such as "The Night-Blooming Cereus" or the entire sequence "Words in the Mourning time." (2) I would suggest, in fact, that
Hayden's poetry cannot be understood except by reference to his religious attitudes. Since for all of his mature life those attitudes have involved active adherence to the Baha'i Faith, it is no exaggeration to say that some knowledge of the Baha'i Faith is essential to an appreciation of his work.

Still, there are signs that Hayden was attracted to religion even as a child, in this case the Protestantism of his youth in Detroit. Religion seems to have been an ever-present part of his childhood life, as witnessed in such poems as “Summertime and the Living…”:

Feels their Mosaic eyes
upon him, though the florist roses
that only sorrow could afford
long since have bidden them Godspeed.

Oh, summer summer summertime—

Then grim street preachers shook
their tambourines and Bibles in the face
of tolerant wickedness;... (3)

or "The Burly Fading One":

Coal miner, stevedore and railroad man,
oh how he brawls and loves,
a Bible over his headlong heart
and no liquor on his breath. (4)

or "Belsen, Day of Liberation":

And because that day was a holy day
when even the dead, it seemed,
must rise, she was allowed to stay
and see the golden strangers who

Were Father, Brother, and her dream
of God... (5)

or "Free Fantasia: Tiger Flowers":

Hardshell believers
amen'd the wreck
as God A'mighty's
will... (6)

In all these poems religion is present not only as an experience but also, and more importantly, as a moral force, determining or at least affecting one's attitude towards "wickedness", "liquor", death and defeat, even manhood and life itself. Yet even in these childhood reminiscences a certain ambivalence or doubting note appears. For
example, in the "Free Fantasia" just quoted, Hayden is careful to distinguish himself from the "hardshell believers":

I'd thought
such gaiety could not
die. Nor could our
elegant avenger. (7)

This is a much later poem than any of the others so far quoted, but even in the earlier poems the overtones of religion are not unambiguous. In "The Rabbi", the rabbi has a sinister air:

Where I grew up, I used to see
the rabbi, dour and pale
in religion's mourner clothes,
walking to the synagogue.

* * *

The rabbi bore my friends off
in his prayer shawl. (8)

He seems in fact to be a witch, kidnapping the poet's friends. In "Aunt Jemina of the Ocean Waves" a mystical insight is heavily intertwined with an awkward sexuality:

So here I am, so here I am,
take mammy to God's mistakes.
And that's the beauty part,
I mean, ain't that the beauty part. (9)

And in "Witch Doctor", blackness, sexuality and religion are fused in an ironic, brilliant and cruel portrait of religion gone mad, a "flock in theopathic tension" before this

fervid juba of God as lover, healer,
conjuror. And of himself as God. (10)

This, as Hayden writes in "Locus", is

the past---
soulscape, Old Testament battleground
of warring shades whose weapons kill. (11)

It should be emphasized that in none of these poems is the religious element forced, or dragged in to add color or significance (in fact, it is often low-key, almost casual); rather, it is a natural consequence of a world view for which God is as much a real character as the flesh-and-blood creatures we say hello to every day.

Religious imagery is also significantly present in Hayden's
narratives ("The Ballad of Nat Turner", "Middle Passage", "Mourning Poem for the Queen of Sunday", "Night, Death, Mississippi", "The Ballad of Sue Ellen Westerfield", "The Dream"). (12) It is difficult, in fact, to find a poem in which reference to God or religion is not made; this alone is an extraordinary fact, and enough to set Hayden apart from other contemporary men of letters. Hayden seems incapable of seeing nature, for example, as other than a symbol, as in "October":

October——
its plangency, its glow

as of words in
the poet's mind,

as of God in
the saint's. (13)

Or "Mountains":

Their surging darkness
drums bells gongs imploring a god. (14)

Certain words seems always to have a symbolic, spiritual meaning, reflecting an underlying religious attitude. The word "dark" is one of these, almost always indicating darkness of soul.

Darkness, darkness.
I grope and falter. Flare
of a match. (15)

("Approximations")

The word "star" is another of these. It receives its fullest treatment in the poem "Stars", which is clearly based on Baha'i imagery (especially the Nine-Pointed Star). (16)

The pervasiveness of religious themes and imagery lead one to ask just what precisely is the function of religion in Hayden's intellectual development and scheme of things. The answer would seem to be that it, and especially the message of Baha'u'llah, is the end of man's "quest for meaning", a quest which is both personal and social and which is described in the poem "and all the atoms cry aloud" as "disastrous", presumably because it has ignored the message of God for this day in going its wicked way through war and injustice. (17) Yet there is a sense in which this "disastrous quest for meaning" is "process, major means whereby, oh dreadfully, our humanness must be achieved," ("Words in the Mourning Time") (18). Here the reader who has not read Shoghi Effendi's book The Promised Day Is Come may be at a bit of a loss to understand what Hayden means(19). Briefly, the idea is that the world's terrible suffering is necessary to give birth to a new world order. The ultimate aim is the
attainment of a new human dimension, a personal as well as a social salvation:

Reclaim now, now renew the vision of
a human world where godliness
is possible and man
is neither gook nigger honkey wop nor kike

but man

permitted to be man. (20)

The Baha'i Faith, then, slakes the world's and the poet's thirst for an answer to the riddle of life (but is the riddle necessary? "The Sphinx" would seem to imply that it is not: "it is possible to live without/my joke and me." ) (21). It also fulfills Hayden's search for a theme.

Alien, at home---as always
everywhere---I roamed
the cobbled island,

and thought of Yeats,
his passionate search for
a theme. Sought mine. (22)

("Kodachromes of the Island")

Hayden's theme, which dominates his entire corpus, is announced in "Theme and Variations": all things alter and

become a something more,
a something less. Are the revelling shadows
of a changing permanence.

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There is, there is, he said, an imminence
that turns to curiosa all I know;
that changes light to rainbow darkness
wherein God waylays us and empowers. (23)

This theme of the imminent spiritual meaning of things is treated with great skill and virtuosity and from quite a variety of points of view, ranging from enthusiastic acceptance to ambivalence to open doubt. But even in his doubt Hayden's reality is symbolic of other realms.

One of his most moving poems, "The Broken Dark," traces the shift from doubt to acceptance. In it, the hospital room becomes a purgatory, and his disease a spiritual uneasiness. Hayden's imagination is so trained to metaphor that all reality is naturally seen as symbolic: even the first sentence, which at first might seem merely
realistic, soon turns into a spiritual landscape:

Sleepless, I stare
from the dark hospital room
at shadows of a flower and its leaves
the nightlight fixes like a blotto
on the corridor wall. Shadow-plays
of Bali—demons move to the left,
gods, in their frangipani crowns
and gold, to the right.

The darkness of the room corresponds to the poet's doubting state of
mind; moreover, it is the darkness that creates the shadowplays on
the wall, that suggests the various gods and demons. By association
of ideas the tremendous question follows; it receives an answer
echoing Macbeth.

Ah and my life
in the shadow of God's laser light—
shadow of deformed homunculus?
A fool's errand given by fools.

Here the depth of despair is followed by apparent madness:

Son, go fetch a pint of pigeon's milk
from the drugstore and be quick.
Demons on the left.

Then a quick recollection from childhood:

Death on either side,
the Rabbi said, the way of life between.

The next lines counterpoint the suffering of another man, presumably
a man without faith (he is a "two-timing lover"), to that of the
poet, who takes heart from realizing that his own predicament is not
so bad:

That groaning. Man with his belly slashed,
two-timing lover. Dying?
The nightnurse rustles by.
Struggles in the pit. I have come back
to tell thee of struggles in the pit.
Perhaps is dying.
Free of pain, my own death still
a theorem to be proved.

The poet conquers, comes back from the pit of doubt and despair;
perhaps also the memory of Baha'u'llah in the pit (the Siyah-Chal)
has been of comfort to him. The poem ends with a prayer of acceptance
and gratitude.

Allah'u'Abha. O Healing Spirit,
Thy nearness our forgiving cure. (24)

If in this poem religious faith comes as a saving grace after a night of doubt, in the sequence "An Inference of Mexico" the inferred presence of God is highly ambiguous. The sequence begins with the savage light, the vulturous presence of death; but despite the "cruciform black bells of clay" the tone and imagery are pagan. God is absent; only heathen death and corruption remain.

In "Mountains", the second poem of the sequence, we find the darkness "imploring a god"—perhaps still a pagan god, but at least a bringer of light. (25) In "Veracruz" it is the pagan sea that dominates, that seems the only reality. The shore "appears a destination dreamed of;/never to be reached". The sea offers a languid temptation:

Leap now
and cease from error.
Escape.

But there is an alternative:

Or shoreward turn,
accepting all—
the losses and farewells,
the long warfare with self,
with God. (26)

The breakwater leads either way, and in this phantasmal scene the reality of the sea is stronger; God is felt to be a presence to be quarreled with.

In "Idol" we seem to find the goddess the mountains' darkness was imploring, but it is a violent, savage goddess, thriving on blood sacrifice, offering no light but taking misguided praise. In "Sub Specie Aeternitatis" two moments in man's religious search (the pagan and the Christian) are counterpointed; both are empty, silent. The empty convent "lifts/its cross against a dark/invasive as the sun"; "hollow cells/are desolate in their/tranquillity/as relic skulls". On the other hand, the pagan god, once "a tippling fiercely joyous god" is now "a conquered and/defiant god". The silence of the gods is palpable. (27)

In "Market" the degradation of the gods is complete. The tourists who "stride/on the hard good legs/money has made them" ignore the barefoot cripple asking for charity and pass by everything in indifference, carcass, dogs, and carnations alike. Even the pagan Fire King is reduced to a "flashing mask of tin" which "looks down with eyes/of sunstruck glass." (28)
It is only in "La Corrida" that the reality of the bullfight prompts a deeper perception of the supernatural; here, in the presence of death, "the bullgod moves,/transfiguring death/and the wish to die". There follows a prayer:

From all we are yet cannot be deliver, oh redeem us now.

Of all we know and do not wish to know, purge oh purge us now.

Olé!

Upon the cross of horns be crucified for us.

Die for us that death may call us back to life.

Olé! (29)

With this strange fusion of pagan ceremony and Cristian sentiment the Mexico sequence ends. In it, the dominant tone is pagan; the mystical or religious is fleeting and ambiguous, empty or threatening or silent or degraded. As in "The Broken Dark", only death prompts the summoning of the divine powers, but here even that summons is ironic.

An illuminating, if rather detached and ironic statement of one stage in the evolution of Hayden's attitude towards religion is the poem "Electrical Storm", which I quote in full:

God's angry with the world again,
the grey neglected ones would say;
He don't like ugly.
Have mercy, Lord, they prayed,
seeing the lightning's
Mene Mene Tekel,
hearing the preaching thunder's deep
Upharsin.
They hunched up, contracting in corners
away from windows and the dog;
huddled under Jehovah's oldtime wrath,
trusting, afraid.

I huddled too, when a boy,
mindful of things they'd told me
God was bound to make me answer for.
But later I was colleged (as they said)
and learned it was not celestial ire
(Beware the infidels, my son)
but pressure systems,
colliding massive energies
that make a storm.
Well for us...

Last night we drove
through suddenly warring weather.
Wind and lightning havocked,
erserked in wires, trees.
Fallen lines we could not see at first
lay in the yard when we reached home.
The hedge was burning in the rain.

Who knows but what
we might have crossed another sill,
had not our neighbors' warning
kept us from our door?
Who knows if it was heavenly design
or chance
(or knows if there's a difference, after all)
that brought us and our neighbors through—
though others died—
the archetypal dangers of the night?

I know what those
cowering true believers would have said. (30)

While not overtly or utterly irreligious in its attitude, the
scepticism of this poem is certainly far closer in tone and outlook
to the benign agnosticism of Robert Frost (whose language and imagery
seem to be echoed in the last stanza) than to the faith of the poem
which follows this in Selected Poems, "Full Moon."

And spread its radiance on the exile’s path
of Him who was The Glorious One,
its light made holy by His holiness.

... the full moon dominates the dark. (31)

The explanation for this shift in attitude may lie in the different
specific beliefs referred to. In "Electrical Storm" Hayden makes it
clear that he has outgrown the doctrines he was taught as a child,
with their naive belief in an anthropomorphic God who intervened in
every moment of one's life and demanded a strange alloy of trust and
fear in worship. In "Full Moon," however, and in the other Baha'i
poems, Hyden is celebrating the healing grace of Baha'u'llah, whose
teachings are felt to be mature, purified of superstition, convinc-
ing, and moving. Consistently in his poetry Hayden dissociates
himself from the superstititious beliefs of the people he grew up
among, pointing with irony to their gullibility and weakness; but as
if by a kind of reflex action his faith in Baha'u'llah seems to burn
that much the stronger.

The midnight air is forested
with presences that shelter Him
and sheltering praise

The auroral darkness which is God
and sing the word made flesh again
in Him,

Eternal exile whose return
epiphanies repeatedly
foretell. (32)
("Baha'u'llah in the Garden of Ridwan")

The rationality of the Baha'i Faith, and its historical appropriateness for our time, exempt it from irony. In no poem is the Baha'i Faith treated with anything but loving belief.

The contrast, then, is between childish superstition and mature faith, between Christian dogma and Baha'i rationality. While interested in all forms and manifestations of the religious outlook, Hayden is able to lend it credence only when it takes on the form of a universal faith, and then, from that vantage point, he can look with fondness on the other guises that the religious impulse has taken. As in "Akhenaten" ("Two Egyptian Portrait Masks"), he can affirm the essential identity of all gods.

Upon the
mountain Aten spoke
and set the spirit moving

in the
Pharaoh's heart: O Lord of every land
shining forth for all:

...the spirit moving
in his heart: Aten Jahveh Allah God. (33)

It is perhaps because of this innermost identity of the religious vocation, because of the basic unity of God, as taught by the Baha'i Faith in its formulation of progressive revelation, that no religious expression is ever condemned or viewed with anything more critical than ironic scepticism or satirical distance. Even the deluded are right in their longing.

The single poem which most completely states Hayden's attitude to the religion he has adopted is one in which there is no overt reference to the Baha'i Faith at all and only a few direct references to gods. Yet "The Night-Blooming Cereus" is one of Hayden's most
religious meditations, as well as one of his most beautiful and complex.

In it the unfolding of the Baha'i faith is likened to the blooming of the cereus. The two persons in the poem (perhaps the poet and his wife?) take slightly different attitudes toward this blooming, but are united in their awe of it. Despite the poet's momentary revulsion, he comes to celebrate the bloom as much as the other, and their final attitude is one of wonder and astonishment.

At the beginning of the poem the two persons are waiting for the bud to "break into flower." The bud, "packed tight with its miracle" "moved/as though impelled by stirrings within itself." The poet is ambivalent about it: "It repelled as much/as it fascinated me/sometimes." The other is more serene: "But you, my dear,/conceded less to the bizarre/than to the imminence/of bloom." Awe unites them: "Yet we agreed/we ought/to celebrate the blossom./Paint ourselves, dance/in honor of/archaic mysteries/when it appeared." Meanwhile, they became aware of the bud's "rigorous design" and "focused energy of will." The bud exists independently of them, and its meanings are not for them: "that/signalling/not meant for us." It appears in darkness (an allusion to the night of ignorance, particularly in nineteenth-century Iran?), but possesses a grace which attracts (a "summoning fragrance"). Before it mundane worries are abandoned: "We dropped/trivial tasks/and marvelled/beheld at last the achieved/flower." It has not yet achieved full growth, though: "Its moonlight/petals were/still unfold/-ing." This flower is called a "lunar presence" (and has "moonlight petals") in reminiscence of the "full moon" that illuminates our dark, the moon that shone on Baha'u'llah. And in accordance with Baha'i teaching, that every new religion starts to die as soon as it is born, and is eventually replaced by another, the bloom is "foredoomed, already dying." At the same time it is utterly ancient: "older than human/cries, ancient as prayers/invoking Osiris, Krishna, Tezcatlipoca." The observers' final stance is one of silent worship: "We spoke/in whispers when/we spoke/at all..." (34)

This is the same awe found in the other poems about Baha'u'llah

He, who is man beatified

And Godly mystery,
... His pain
our anguish and our anodyne. (35)
("From the Corpse Woodpiles, from the Ashes")

Energies
like angels dance

Glorias of recognition.
Within the rock the undiscovered suns
release their light. (36)
("Baha'u'llah in the Garden of Ridwan")
There would seem to be little that could be added to this mystic wonderment. As with all mystics, Hayden's true message can only be adequately expressed by silence, by a kind of ritual pointing at the ineffable. It is the irony of his or any mystic's fate to have to do this pointing with words.

A recent poem adds little more than a theological footnote to this point of view, suggesting as it does that even evil may be created by God for his own good purposes.

Almighty God
He fashioned me
for to be a scourge,
the scourge of all humanity.
("Theory of Evil") (37)

It is difficult to know just how seriously Hayden means the reader to take this, but the idea would seem to be, perhaps, in accordance with Baha'i ideas on the non-existence of evil and more particularly with Shoghi Effendi's interpretation of apparent historical evil as furthering the process of chastening and refining the human race for its coming maturity.

In any case, Hayden's final message is one not of despair, but of faith and hope—quite unusually so in today's literary world. It is difficult to think of any other contemporary poet for whom the religious experience is so meaningful; perhaps only John Berryman in his later years approached the intensity of mystical feeling present in the best of Hayden's verse. But Berryman could never be a steady convert, and the temptation of death was too strong for him. It is not too much to say that Hayden's peculiar religious stance makes him unique in modern letters, and contributes powerfully to the formation of his rich poetic personality.
NOTES


(3) Angle of Ascent, p. 111.

(4) Ibid., p. 105.

(5) Ibid., p. 82.

(6) Ibid., p. 7.

(7) Ibid.

(8) Ibid., p. 81.

(9) Ibid., p. 43.


(11) Ibid., p. 45.


(13) Ibid., p. 65.

(14) Ibid., p. 90.

(15) Ibid., p. 83.

(16) Ibid., pp. 11-15.

(17) Ibid., p. 62. Hayden writes: "toward Him our history in its disastrous quest for meaning is impelled."

(18) Ibid., p. 59.


(20) Robert Hayden, Words in the Mourning Time, p. 49.

(21) Hayden, Angle, p. 35.
(22) Ibid., p. 49.

(23) Ibid., p. 115.

(24) Ibid., p. 39.

(25) Ibid., p. 90.

(26) Ibid., pp. 91-2.

(27) Ibid., pp. 93-4.

(28) Ibid., pp. 95-6.

(29) Ibid., p. 98.

(30) Ibid., pp. 77-8.

(31) Ibid., p. 79 (also found in Robert Hayden, Selected Poems (New York: October House, 1966), p. 15).

(32) Hayden, Angle, p. 117.

(33) Ibid., p. 17.

(34) Ibid., p. 24-6.


(36) Ibid., p. 117.

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