

[American Journal]

after Robert Hayden

here among them the americans you know what it is
what it was what it will be the stalks of their purple
throats like lilacs their sounds reckless as mercy
how best to describe these beings born alien
homeless everywhere unafraid to die

the meek do inherit the earth only after the new
world becomes the old country with no pot to piss in
nor window to throw it out of the children strike me
as angels of bread latchkey kids who sell pig snoot
and loose squares to space travelers such as myself

charming savages first world problems these are
the ones left behind the others bound long ago for
jupiter and neptune helmets polished like oldsmobiles
bodies covered in papier-mâché some can still recall
the white puffy suits how hard the fabric was to sow

under disguise i easily pass for an american
wool pulled over my scalp the color of day's end
drooped across my shoulders i know their signals
for love and anger their etiquette for how to survive
their custom house where chickens come to roost

i trace the great migration follow the trail to detroit
gawk at the lions carved from stone their stoic majesty
slippery as catfish the air cries tear gas grief drove
out by water although they want it in the worst way
the clouds no longer handout rain

on the south side of chicago i watch a man jump off
a hospital roof i record the way his gown inflates like a red
hot air balloon fact and fantasy never twice the same
i make a note the people could fly the men
leave and go north of the future

in new york i observe the women the last of the american
dream i was told they can still grow a body mystical
how they bleed and do not die birds of paradise sprout
from their tulips they call them underground astronauts
their breasts hang a prepackaged food supply

worshippers of waste americans recycle the past
swim in plastic bags up to their necks

build machines to make their lives better
only to distrust the very things they have
created technology merely a mirror

a reflection of their own fragile image
these people are grandfathered in to history
history now obsolete to lie means to tell a story
they want me to take them at their word
i solemnly swear to tell their truth

america as much a problem in metaphysics as
immortality the nation of lost heads rolled into
the galaxy like stars each one a grain of sand in
the night's deep pockets where no hole is black
enough for wounds to exit

today crowds are gathering in the streets people
light fireworks eat hot dogs eyes red they paint
their faces blue don their gun powdered wigs for
the parade they sing the land of the free until it
hurts their art is pain suffered and outlived

what to a slave is the fourth of july when
resurrection falls on the third those of steadfast
faith americans believe in life but only in life
after death they say the only free man is a dead man
and in this way gain life eternal

i am attracted to the promise of this land
its hunger dances naked on the table i touch
the mouth of its decadent poverty i sit on the face
of such music it leaves the taste of soil on my lips
snow falls clouds melt i write this page of sky

confess i present these findings to you sans
an objective lens i solely report that for which we
have language the rest i cannot penetrate or
name in the end i speak against silence
though it is silence that moves me to speak