

On Meeting Robert Hayden in a Dream

ABDUL ALI

here among them the dead the others the aliens
 I see you without coke bottle glasses a wavy comb over
 your nose buried inside a notebook over-

flowing with strange sightings men and women
 without a homeland a library to shelve histories
 dreams the names of rare flowers fruits baby names

exiled from their villages learning to say hello
 with accents thick with nostalgia for their purple planets
 here UFO sightings aren't so spectacular

border crossing is quintessentially american universal
 crowds gather in squalid ghettos where every country is a city
 every city is a verse & every verse echoes "Those Winter Sundays"

where a New World opens up where all the martians are welcome
 at the writing table with their fountain pens & swollen digits
 & you whispering

what took so long?

POEM NOTE

"On Meeting Robert Hayden in a Dream" is in homage to Robert Hayden, a giant of American and African American letters. When I first read his collection *American Journal*, I was immediately struck by his interest in "the other." I do not need to tell you how relevant his work is today. Are we not "aliens" to each other? Are we not holding signs claiming that our lives matter? I believe now more than ever, Hayden's work needs to be discussed as a pillar of American literature in the way that we talk about Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson.