

Attestaments

CHARLES H. LYNCH

for Robert Hayden*

at Cathedral Church of St. John The Divine The Poets' Corner bay
 his stone plaque ensconced among ascendant neighbors:
 Hawthorne contiguous above
 stage left, Poe
 Emily Elizabeth Dickinson skirting right
 Twain smack-dab below

tan panda coffee mugger confiding, gentle man
 birth claim: Asa Bundy Sheffey (of Paradise Valley, Detroit)
 alas, alien alias (Robert Hayden) among Earth works' trustees

oiled, crimpy hair button-down striped bow tie
 suspended paunch stiff, uncreased blue jeans
 sloped shoulders serape-draped in Hotel Chelsea drafts

gladly treats me, delving doctoral candidate
 clasps menu three inches from face
 squints, lenses flat loupes
 steers chopsticks' snaps after wanton soup noodles

Bob's keen hear holds elders natchal talk
 mimics folksy quotes whimsy about thin dime times

per his poems (and tendered mine), precise interpretive advice:
 scrub blurry words prism cinematically in rhythm
 limn worn masks to marquee character

rueful grimace behind gender's seductively flimsy scrim
 hint taboo in parables of guilt, temptation, regret
 forehead clutch blanching confesses quandary

weighs career tact facts sallies into reputations

Black-tracked by Caucasian persuasion's poetry cliques
frown smirk splays palm on table to stress a point

prickly about dim versifiers spot-lit—and critics' canon fodder
catches himself stokes briar pipe purses lips
then, anecdotal poke fun jowly owl's guttural guggle

what I liked about him most? . . . candid, jovial, funkily avuncular
(and, eighteen years later, gate ajar to my Declaration):
laud Baha'u'llah Baha'i unifier supreme Peace Teacher

with pensword honing deft anger with love,
chronicled Afrogenic caravansary
incised coal flow to furnace "lessons of our blood"

until that wintry Michigan Monday his great heart closed

*Robert Hayden (1913-1980) was an American poet, essayist, educator and Bahá'í. He was the first African-American to serve as Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress, a role today known as Poet Laureate of the United States.