

Hidden Meanings in the Poetry of Robert Hayden

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Robert Hayden was, in the 1970s, the first American of African descent to be appointed Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress, a position now known as Poet Laureate of the United States. His life and work are therefore significant, more so since he came from the ghettos of Detroit. He considered himself a symbolist poet despite the fact that much of his work is direct and based clearly on historical individuals, events or situations. In fact, his poetry is best known now because of its historical nature, but his work has more depth than that. Because he considered himself a symbolist poet, readers may pass over words and phrases not immediately meaningful to them as part of some symbolism when in fact they are not symbolic. They may have clear and evident meanings, but to the reader they are hidden. It is these hidden meanings that this essay will explore and reveal. The text of his *Collected Poems* will be used for ease of access to readers.

In many commentaries on the poetry of Robert Hayden reference is made to his acceptance of the Bahá'í Faith with minimal or no elaboration. His religion was an important part of his life. That the Bahá'í teachings influenced his poetry is known, but that influence is seldom considered in depth. Sometimes critics make vague allusions to Bahá'í teachings regarding the brotherhood of races or acceptance of religions, but such statements, though accurate, fall far short of understanding. "While his poetry confronted social issues, it also reflected his religious background with its particular emphasis on the unity of human-kind."¹ That is just the barest gloss. Without greater understanding many meanings in the poetry remain hidden.

The Bahá'í Faith influenced Hayden's work on multiple levels and a knowledge of that will give a greater appreciation for the depth of his work. At the conclusion of his *Selected Poems*, Hayden provided the briefest of notes regarding some Bahá'í references in that volume illuminating some of the hidden meanings, but such notes were not continued in later collections and they have largely

gone unnoticed. This essay will examine some of those hidden meanings, levels of reference and influence from indirect to obvious. The results may be surprising.

Robert Hayden was born in Detroit, Michigan in 1913. His early life was marked by the poverty and deprivation common to most minority populations in the United States in the 1920s and 30s. His Detroit ghetto carried the ironic name, "Paradise Valley." Not only was day-to-day living an economic and emotional struggle for the family, but Hayden's own poor eyesight kept him from participating in neighborhood activities with other children. It was an added agony in his life.

Hayden sought refuge in the world of books. He taught himself to read before entering public school and kept on reading. Hayden developed a passion for learning which was encouraged by his natural mother when they had contact. The foster family she had placed him with did not share this passion and did not even understand it. The differences between these two attitudes were an additional tension in Hayden's childhood. Though bewildered at first, eventually, Ma and Pa Hayden came to accept the literary yearnings of the young Robert.

Later in his life, discovery of the failure of the Haydens to formally and legally adopt him, as he had been told, caused Robert Hayden additional anguish. When he applied for a passport, no record could be found of the birth of Robert Earl Hayden. He did not exist. Instead, records indicated that his legal name was Asa Earl Sheffey, the name his biological mother had given him at birth. She was divorced from Hayden's biological father shortly before the child was born, and placed him in the care of the Haydens to raise while she looked for work elsewhere. The pull on his life between the Haydens, his biological mother (whom he knew and saw frequently) and, to a lesser extent, his biological father (whom he knew but met only a few times) was a major stress in Robert Hayden's life. He later wrote about this in the poem titled, 'Names.'

A librarian at the public library selected books for the young Hayden to read and expand his horizons beyond the ghetto. A social worker assisted him in obtaining a scholarship to attend college. The Haydens, in time, accepted the boy's dream and sacrificed further to help him. The entire neighborhood contributed nickels and dimes to help him get "colleged." He was the first in the ghetto to successfully complete high school and go on to a higher level of education. After college, another influence entered his life: Erma Inez Morris. She has been described as "one of the most prominent forces in Hayden's life during this time of growth and development as a writer and thinker."² They were married in 1940.

The difference between Hayden and his wife were striking. She has been described as being, "quite different in temperament from the young poet. She was demonstrative, happy, affirmative,

resilient. The granddaughter of an Episcopalian priest, the daughter of parents who had met in medical school, Erma was born in Philadelphia in 1911 into a family which had infused in her expectations of college and achievements, exceptional for that place and time. Her family's middle-class expectations for her did not include a poor, struggling poet from Detroit's eastside who was sensitive, almost fragile in some ways, and subject to despair."³

Publication of his first slim volume of poetry, *Heart-Shape in the Dust*, the year they were married, may have eased some of her family's objections to the marriage. Here was evidence, at least, that Hayden was serious about his art. Adding prestige to his publication was its review in the *New York Times* – impressive indeed! Despite its auspicious beginnings, this little book did not stand the test of time. Even Hayden himself came to criticize it and eventually relegated it to the large body of his work which he considered unworthy. Finding a copy today is not merely rare, but virtually impossible.

Critics of this book contend that it is, “more protest statement than poetry, it no longer pleases modern readers, partially because we are no longer moved by the subjects treated.”⁴ Poems in it are “dated and repetitious, echoing themes already used too often during the (Harlem) Renaissance years.”⁵ The fault, one critic theorized, may lie in that “the poet is writing formulaically, choosing subjects that the socially aware poet was supposed to select, using forms and themes that he borrowed from other poets, only a few poems seem deeply felt.”⁶ If he had continued in this vein, Hayden would have disappeared long ago in the mass of protest rhetoric that buried so many of his contemporaries who are seldom remembered today.

Hayden rejected poetry for propaganda's sake. The art was as important as the message. He refused to write poetry according to a “Black agenda,” determined by radical black militants. During the 1940s his poetic career looked promising. Yet in the 50s and early 60s, he accomplished little. Finally, an award that stunned him, came in 1966. This was the “Grand prix de la Poesie” awarded in Dakar, Senegal, at the First World Festival of Negro Arts. In the last decade of his life, honors and accomplishments followed one another in a steady stream, and still today, decades after his death in 1980, his work continues to be anthologized and analyzed as a permanent and valued contribution to the American literary canon.

One of the highest honors was his appointment, three times, as Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress. Amazingly his employer would not let him accept the first appointment; his later employer granted him leave to accept the second two. These terms extended from 1976-78. He was the first American of African descent to receive this honor. In 1985 the position was

renamed, Poet Laureate of the United States, to more clearly reflect the honor it bestowed. Robert Hayden was poet laureate of his country and invited to read his poetry at the White House – a long way indeed from the Detroit ghetto!

Hayden's first contact with the Bahá'í Faith occurred when he was an adult, through his bride, Erma. Later, he said he had accepted the Bahá'í Faith for several reasons: the teaching of progressive revelation (that religious truth is revealed to humanity sequentially in different times and places, the latest being Bahá'u'lláh in nineteenth century Persia), the teachings on the harmony of science and religion (each is held accountable to the other – if scientific investigation contradicts religious belief, the belief should be discarded, and science has to be morally responsible for its results), and the overarching teachings of the unity of the human race (confirmed scientifically now by the Human Genome Project: "The human genome sequence is almost (99.9%) exactly the same in all people."⁷).

His initial reaction to the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh was one of detached interest. His wife of two years urged him to investigate and he firmly stated that, if she insisted, he would refuse. In his own time, and at his own pace, Hayden learned more and more about the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. Though its teachings were in tune with his own yearnings, the Bahá'í religion was drastically different from his own Baptist upbringing; no clergy, no sermons, no ritual such as communion or baptism. Eventually, in 1943, he made the decision and formally entered the Bahá'í community.⁸

The decision did not initially appear to influence the poetry he wrote. Even years later he did not consider it to have had much effect, but upon reflection, Hayden concluded that it must have, "I realize it has given me a base, a focus."⁹ Writing from a Bahá'í perspective was not a conscious decision. The influence of his faith came through his work naturally and spontaneously. He did not set that as a goal, it was simply part of his life.

Speaking to this point in an early assessment of Hayden's work, Gerald Parks observed that "a number of poems...are almost propaganda pieces."¹⁰ Not necessarily. Are poems by a devout Christian also considered "propaganda pieces"? Not usually.

Parks concluded that Hayden's poetry cannot be understood except by reference to his religious attitudes.¹¹ That point is one to be well aware of, yet it is often noted only in passing or dismissed completely. Insufficient consideration of this influence will hamper understanding of Hayden's poems. Chad Walsh was more specific when he concluded that Hayden's "...commitment to the Baha'i Faith quietly infuses a great deal of his poetry, which can be by turn lyrical, meditative, and dramatic."¹² That quiet infusion has all too often been ignored. This essay will address these hidden

meanings and the reader will gain a clearer understanding of the depth of Hayden's work.

Hayden's level of involvement in the Bahá'í community should be noted. He participated locally as well as nationally, though there were some limits due to his poor eyesight, for example, he could not drive. In 1967 he was appointed poetry editor to the national Bahá'í quarterly, *World Order*. He retained the position the rest of his life. Other involvement is not so well documented and will have to await further research.

It is important to note that Hayden was not a spokesman for the Bahá'í community. The Bahá'í influence in his poetry came from Hayden himself, not from some position he held. As poetry editor for *World Order* he selected poems for publication and wrote introductions for three collections of poetry published in its pages. He did not have a vested interest in advertising the fact that he was a Bahá'í. His goal was to write and promote good poetry. This he did.

The indirect influence of the Bahá'í revelation on Hayden's work should be noted for the reader to be well informed. It might seem difficult to identify, but it is actually not. We could begin by looking at thematic changes in his work prior to and after his conversion. Major themes which would logically derive from a Bahá'í influence would be racial unity, world peace and religious harmony; reflecting three pivotal Bahá'í teachings. The first two were important to Hayden before his contact with the Bahá'í Faith, so they cannot be evidence here – they are certainly not hidden. The third, religious harmony, is only minimally present in his later work, but not hidden either.

What then is left to be evidence of an indirect influence? The broadest answer is: the style of all his subsequent body of work. This statement may at first appear too sweeping to be valid, but it is obvious. "In very few poets is the change of tone so pronounced as in the Robert Hayden of *A Ballad of Remembrance* (1962) when compared with the Robert E. Hayden of *Heart-Shape in the Dust* (1940). The latter shows a young novice poet following, perhaps too closely, models from the New Negro Renaissance."¹³ And, a biographer confirmed, "Most people's writing changes with time, but maintains some continuity. Hayden's does not. Some of the themes are there – world peace and brotherhood, for instance – but the style is radically different. It is as if his early work was written by an entirely different person."¹⁴

How or why would a person's writing so change as to read like that of two different people? This leads us to the theme of transformation, the fundamental purpose of all religion. Christ is recalled to have said to simple fishermen, "Come after me and be my disciples, and I will make you into fishers of men."¹⁵ They were not before, but they were afterwards. This was transformation caused by the teachings of Christ. One of the themes also found in the Bahá'í Revelation is that of

personal transformation: to make of ourselves more than we thought possible, to elevate our spiritual nature while governing and directing our physical needs and impulses. In Bahá'í scriptures there are many references to such personal transformation. One statement in a prayer invoking God and referring to the believers of every religion, states:

Indeed, Thou has assisted Thy servants in the past and, though they were the weakest of Thy creatures, the lowliest of Thy servants and the most insignificant of those who lived upon the earth, through Thy sanction and potency they took precedence over the most glorious of Thy people and the most noble of mankind. Whereas formerly they were as moths, they became as royal falcons, and whereas before they were as brooks, they became as seas, through Thy bestowal and Thy mercy.¹⁶

From the ghetto-bred writer of somewhat tritely worded protest verse to Poet Laureate of the United States, Robert Hayden came a long way. Is it improbable that some of this promised transformation did indeed occur? The evidence, in answer, appears overwhelmingly affirmative.

Transformation is certainly evident in the first poem to be discussed here. It is one of Hayden's earliest historical poems and is titled, 'Dawnbreaker.' There is no indication in the text, and no note, to state the source of inspiration for the poem. It was first collected in *Selected Poems*. To a reader unfamiliar with the history of the Bahá'í Faith, and its precursor, the Bábí Faith, the poem may seem to be purely symbolic and obscure. And, its true meaning will remain hidden. To one who knows that history, it is not.

The first meaning to be unveiled is that of the term, "dawn-breaker," a descriptor used to refer to members of the Bábí religion, the faith of the Herald of Bahá'u'lláh, who Bahá'ís regard as being also a Messenger of God. When the account of those events was translated into English the title given to that history was, *Dawn-Breakers*. That history is the inspiration for the poem. Though his name is not mentioned, this poem tells the story of the death of Sulaymán Khán. He was the son of an officer in the service of the father of the shah (king) of Persia and highly influential in the court in his own right. Khán's standing was so respected that when others were condemned to death for their allegiance to the new faith, he was not. Later this exemption was reversed.

The poem tells this story and begins:

Ablaze
with candles sconced
in weeping eyes
of wounds,

He danced
through jeering streets
to death;¹⁷.

His flesh was pierced and candles inserted into the wounds, then the candles were lit. He danced through the streets with praise on his lips to his death.

A historian of those events recorded:

When they arrested Sulaymán Khán, and strove, in consideration of his faithful service and loyalty, to induce him, by promises of rewards from the king, to abandon the creed which he had adopted, he would not consent, but answered firmly: 'His Majesty the King has a right to demand from his servants fidelity, loyalty, and uprightness; but he is not entitled to meddle with their religious convictions.' In consequence of this boldness of speech, it was ordered that his body should be pierced with wounds, and that into each of these wounds a lighted candle should be inserted as an example to others.¹⁸

The text of the poem takes the reader from the flames of the candles inserted into flesh to the metaphysical fires of anguish that consume current society and the not so metaphysical riots that have caused our cities to burn, to the cleansing fire of tests. Here is the only symbolism in this poem. Fire has the power to separate metals from impurities that dilute them. Bahá'í Sacred Texts state that gold is tested and purified by fire and the servants of God are then tested by the gold. It is through such symbolic tests that the human soul is saved from being consumed by self. Hawthorne said much the same thing in his story, 'Earth's Holocaust.' Hayden's poem concludes:

Flames nestled in
his flesh

Fed the
fires that consume
us now, the fire that
will save.¹⁹

Despite Hayden's assertion that he was a symbolist poet, there is only a slight use of symbolism here, the rest is based on fact. If those facts are unknown the meaning of the poem remains hidden.

In an interview in January 1971 with Paul McClusky, his editor at Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, McClusky asked Hayden,

'The reference to the Bahá'í Faith in this poem (Full Moon) is one of many that appear in your

poetry. How important are your religious beliefs to you as a poet?' Hayden answered: 'As a Bahá'í I am committed to belief in the fundamental oneness of all races, the essential oneness of mankind, to the vision of world unity. And these are increasingly powerful influences on my poetry today.'²⁰.

This interview was later published as a section of *How I Write*.

In the poem 'Full Moon,' the fifth and sixth stanzas read:

and burned in the Garden of Gethsemane,
its light made holy by the blazing tears
with which it mingled.

and spread its radiance on the exile's path
of Him who was The glorious one
its light made holy by His holiness.²¹

In discussing this poem, Hayden stated: "From there (the time of Christ) we move to the nineteenth century – to a spring in 1862, to be specific. The 'Glorious One' alluded to is Bahá'u'lláh, Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, and like Christ, a divine "manifestation of God."²² The allusion begins with the reference to "the exile's path." The hidden meaning here refers to the exiles of Bahá'u'lláh, initially from His home in Tehran, in the Persian Empire, first to Baghdad in the Otto-man Empire and continuing subsequently to Constantinople (Istanbul), to Adrianople (Edirne) and finally to the penal colony of Acre (Akko in present-day Israel) which few prisoners survived.

Comparing Christ and Bahá'u'lláh is not difficult for Bahá'ís who see parallels in Their missions and reception by the world. And, Bahá'ís believe one to be the fulfillment of the other. Here in comparison is to the betrayal both suffered at the hands of the people to whom They appeared.

Two notes in *Selected Poems* refer to hidden meanings in that volume, first in 'Full Moon,' as stated above, and in 'From the Corpse Woodpile, From the Ashes.' In the latter the reference is:

that cloacal cell
where He, who is man beautified

And Godly mystery
lies chained, His pain
our anguish and our anodyne.²³

The capitalized pronouns are one hint to the hidden meaning. Bahá'ís capitalize pronouns referring to the three central figures of their Faith (Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá), and the founders of other faiths out of respect for Them. In this case the reference is to Bahá'u'lláh, whose identity is verified by the allusion that he "lies chained." There were no seats, or beds, in the prisons of that time.

The first time He was imprisoned for His beliefs, Bahá'u'lláh was alternately secured to one of two sets of chains so heavy and notorious that they had been given individual names. One weighed over a hundred pounds, the second was slightly lighter.²⁴ They did not allow a prisoner much movement and no rest or relief.

This prison had been converted from a cistern for storing water so there was no provision for human needs: no windows, no light, no ventilation, no toilet facilities, no drainage. The poem describes the prison as "cloacal," meaning like a sewer or latrine, which it most certainly was. A modern visitor described it as having:

A barrel roof, vertical sides and a flat brick floor enclosed a space perhaps twenty meters long, lightless even when the jailers opened the single door above the last short, steep, seven steps from the access hallway to the floor... At the angle of the wall and floor of the two long sides of the chamber sat the prisoners side by side, the central space between their feet functioning as an aisle for the jailers. There was no drainage and no removal of wastes... The chained prisoners could scarcely move in their floor-fastened shackles, and then only in concert.²⁵

A fellow prisoner with Bahá'u'lláh described the conditions they endured:

We were all huddled together in one cell, our feet in stocks, and around our necks fastened the most galling of chains. The air we breathed was laden with the foulest impurities, while the floor on which we sat was covered with filth and infested with vermin. No ray of light was allowed to penetrate the pestilential dungeon or to warm its icy coldness.²⁶

This is a far cry from today's prisons, especially those with air conditioning, television, weight rooms and other amenities.

In this poem the inhumanity of the Nazi death camps is given as just one example of the inhumanity the human race has typically exhibited toward those perceived to be a threat. The situation continues to the time the poem was written as South Africa and the divided country of Korea are included.

The poem most noted by early students of Hayden's work which symbolically addresses the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is 'The Night-Blooming Cereus,' initially published in the volume of the

same name. There is no overt Bahá'í reference, the entire meaning is hidden, but obvious to those with knowledge of the Bahá'í understanding of human history. The poem describes waiting for the flowering of this exotic blossom. The spiritual allusion breaks into the poem one third of the way into the poem with the reference to “archaic mysteries.” This alerts the reader that the subject is older, basic and fundamental to the human relationship to the other than current, superficial society. This is reinforced when the speaker states that “we dropped / trivial tasks.”

The watchers become in devotional awe of this unfolding event:

We spoke
in whispers
when we spoke at all . . .²⁷

The observers become aware of the transcendence of this event, at least that it transcends the ordinariness of their own lives. As Hatcher, one of the first critics to note this allusion explains, the characters in the poem are aware that they are in the presence of a vital connection to an eternal ordering, much as the succession of religious messengers. In Hatcher's explication the flower is Bahá'u'lláh, or perhaps the Bahá'í revelation, which like all Revelations of the major religions, came in a time of human darkness, the darkness of the setting of the poem. This theme of Divine appearance is often repeated in Bahá'í scriptures. Their obvious reverence is manifest in the speechlessness drawn out ellipsis which end the poem.

The physical event in the poem, indicated by the reverence, is a metaphor for a spiritual reality, one that transcends our daily, and daylight, light. The light of knowledge is contrasted with the darkness of ignorance.

The Messengers or Manifestations of God, those Beings who manifest the message of God to humanity (according to Bahá'í teachings these include, plus others, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Krishna, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, and now, Bahá'u'lláh), elevate the human race in stages. Their message dispels the darkness of human ignorance one step at a time to purify the human race from our focus on physical attributes to understand that our spiritual nature can and must be elevated and more developed.²⁸

The Bahá'í teachings affirm that these individuals are different, yet the same. “...each Manifestation of God hath a distinct individuality, a definitely prescribed mission, a pre-destined revelation, and specially designated limitations. Each one of them is known by a different name, is characterized by a special attribute, fulfils a definite mission, and entrusted with a particular revelation...all their utterances are, in reality, but the expressions of one Truth.”²⁹ Because of these

outward differences, different religions have arisen, yet Bahá'u'lláh explained how the unity in their messages can be understood. A major obstacle to that understanding is to weed out the human additions and distortions.

Hatcher continues about the poem:

The expectancy, the understanding that archaic mysteries are still alive, all parallel the emotions of a Bahá'í aware of the incipience of mankind's fulfillment. The bloom of the flower may indeed represent the appearance of the Prophet Himself, who throughout His ministry cautioned His followers to adhere to His guidance since He would be with them in person only briefly. But regardless, the final focus is on the simultaneous and unifying insight on the part of both husband and wife regarding the feeling of beauty, powers and reverence which this event inspires. The appearance itself is 'Lunar' (fleeting and in the night time), but the effect it has on the observers, we infer, will be lasting. For this reason Hayden has written the poem in the past tense to indicate the lasting impact this epiphany has had on their lives.³⁰

In a note he adds, "In effect, awaiting the flower's bloom may symbolize the couple's search, and the flower's bloom may symbolize the fulfillment of that search in discovering the Bahá'í Faith."³¹ This symbolism works both ways: mankind is lost in the spiritual darkness which precedes the appearance of each Prophet/Manifestation, and individual lives are in darkness until that person finds the knowledge of God and spiritual truth.

Those who do not recognize this central theme of the Bahá'í Faith have considered the blossom merely to be, "Hayden's most deeply moving recognition of the creative life force,"³² This generalized simplification leaves the complete meaning hidden. Knowledge of Hayden's Bahá'í beliefs gives a more true and complete understanding to the meaning of the poem.

In 'The Night-Blooming Cereus,' Hayden says the blooming of the flower evokes emotions:

older than human
cries, ancient as prayers
invoking Osiris, Krishna,
Tezcatlipoca.³³

The religious nature of the poem is clearly evident. Here Hayden combines historical and proto-historical, some would say mythic, characters of religious significance: Osiris to the ancient Egyptians, Krishna to the Indian subcontinent and Tezcatlipoca to the Aztecs of Mesoamerica. That their historicity is unverified does not negate their influence or role in those civilizations, a role that could well have been civilization-founding just as Messengers of God in more historic times such as

Christ and Muhammad. They reflect divine ordination in human history.³⁴

There could well be an additional implication of the warning by Christ for His followers to be “awake” and alert when His Spirit returns to human society. This is stated in Matthew 24:42, Mark 13:36 and Luke 21:36. “Watch, therefore – give strict attention, be cautious and active – for you do not know in what kind of a day [whether a near or remote one] your Lord is coming.”³⁵ “[Watch, I say] lest He comes suddenly and un-expectedly and find you asleep.”³⁶ “Keep awake and watch at all times (that is, be discreet, attentive and ready); praying that you may have the full strength and ability and be accounted worthy to escape all these things [taken together] that will take place, and to stand in the presence of the Son of Man.”³⁷

Bahá’ís believe this has been fulfilled in the Message of Bahá’u’lláh.

The next poem to be discussed here has been described as “one of Hayden’s great unread poems... (it) describes the night before the Exiled One revealed himself and his mission to his followers.”³⁸ Though there is one direct reference to the Bahá’í Faith in the poem, there is much more that is less obvious. This poem may, at first, appear to have no hidden meaning, yet its full meaning depends on knowledge of some history of the Bahá’í religion. It directly and openly refers to the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh and is titled: ‘Bahá’u’lláh in the Garden of Ridwan.’ This poem originally appeared in *Ballad of Remembrance* with the title, ‘The Prophet.’ It is not clear why the title was changed or, after the change, why a variant spelling of Ridván was used. “Riḍván” (pronounced rezz-von³⁹;) means: “good pleasure, favor, acceptance, garden or paradise, as well as the name of the custodian of Paradise.⁴⁰ Paradise, in this case, referring to Heaven. The “Garden of Riḍván” is the name of two identically designated gardens known to Bahá’ís. The first on the edge of Baghdad on the banks of the Tigris where Bahá’u’lláh declared His mission in 1863, the other in present-day Israel. The poem speaks of pivotal events which occurred in the first garden.

Writing about that garden, the Guardian and Head of the Bahá’í Faith wrote:

The arrival of Bahá’u’lláh in the Najibiyyia Garden, subsequently designed by His followers as the Garden of Riḍván, signalizes the commencement of what has come to be recognized as the holiest and most significant of all Bahá’í festivals, the festival commemorating the Declaration of His Mission to His Companions.⁴¹

Describing the events of that declaration an eye witness wrote:

One night, the ninth night of the waxing moon, I happened to be one of those who watched beside His (Bahá’u’lláh’s) blessed tent. As the hour of midnight approached, I saw Him issue from His tent, pass by the places where some of His companions were sleeping, and begin to

pace up and down the moonlit flower-bordered avenues of the garden. So loud was the singing of the nightingales on every side that only those who were near Him could hear distinctly His voice.⁴²

After twelve days spent in the garden, Bahá'u'lláh left Baghdad by order of the Sultan to further exile, the next destination being Constantinople. His final destination was the, at the time, penal colony of Acre, then the western extremity of the Ottoman Empire. For most prisoners that destination was itself, effectively, a sentence of death.

Without that knowledge the meaning of the “agonies” relating to further banishment, and the “swords” to one who is captive, the “midnight” of spiritual darkness, “presences that shelter” forces of God that were promised to protect Him, the “eternal exile” for the balance of His life and through history, the “borrowed garden” because its use was loaned for the days of Ridván, and all the rest, would remain hidden.

The text of the poem reads:

Agonies confirm His hour
and swords like compass-needles turn
toward His heart,
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.
He watches in a borrowed garden
prays. And sleepers toss upon
their armored beds,
Half-roused by golden knocking at
the doors of consciousness. Energies
like angels dance
Glorias of recognition.

Within the rock the undiscovered suns
release their light.⁴³

“Auroral darkness which is God,” may seem an odd phrase, but here Hayden is weaving his faith with a symbol. “Auroral” means pertaining to or resembling dawn. The “darkness” that is God is not a negative or vindictive darkness, but darkness due to our human lack of ability to completely comprehend our Creator. Just as a pot cannot comprehend the potter who creates it, nor the table the carpenter, we created beings cannot fully know our Creator. We can, though, know about our Creator through the special Messengers who manifest the qualities and attributes of the Creator. In result, to the degree that we emulate and exemplify those attributes in our lives and world, human society advances.

“Undiscovered suns” would most likely be the nucleus of atoms inside rocks and all other physical objects which were unknown to science at the time of the events of the poem.

‘Words in the Mourning Time,’ the title poem in the volume of the same name, is unique among Hayden’s poems in that it contains both hidden, indirect and one of the most direct of all influences to the Bahá’í religion. This multi-sectioned poem memorializes the deaths of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy as they occurred so close together in the summer of 1968 and extinguished the hopes of millions. It was one of the most violent periods in American history.

The second stanza of the first section relates:

I grieve. Yet know the vanity
of grief – through power of
The Blessed Exile’s
transilluminating word.⁴⁴

The capitalization is the first clue that the reference is to the Divine. Knowledge of Bahá’u’lláh’s exiles and His voluminous writings⁴⁵ supply the identity referred to and the meaning is therefore no longer hidden. The entire subsequent stanza refers to a major theme of Bahá’u’lláh’s Message: that humanity is in a stage of transitions from a level of childishness, “childbed,” to a more mature level of responsibilities, “our humanness must be achieved.” Just as an individual person grows and matures, so too, Bahá’í teaching state, does the human race.

The Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith explained that human society is reaching, “...the consummation of human evolution - an evolution that has had its earliest beginnings in the birth of family life, its subsequent development in the achievement of tribal solidarity, leading in turn to the constitution of the city-state, and expanding later into the institution of independent and sovereign nations.⁴⁶

This next stage that we are reaching was indicated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá when in the U.S. in 1912. When a federal official asked how he could best serve his country, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá answered, “You can best serve your country if you strive, in your capacity as a citizen of the world, to assist in the eventual application of the principle of federalism underlying the government of your own country to the relationships now existing between the peoples and nations of the world.”⁴⁷.

But what of, “The vanity of grief”? Our grief does not benefit the deceased, therefore it is not “for” them, it is for us alone. The Bahá’í Sacred Texts clearly state, “I have made death a messenger of joy to thee. Wherefore dost thou grieve? I have made the light to shine on thee its splendor. Why dost thou veil thyself therefrom?”⁴⁸.

Hayden explains in the poem how the deaths of King and Kennedy fit into the larger picture of our times. Section I concludes:

aware of how these deaths, how all
the agonies of our deathbed childbed age
are process, major means whereby,
oh dreadfully, our humanness must be achieved.⁴⁹

The phrase, “deathbed childbed age,” refers to the Bahá’í belief that human society is currently undergoing a transition from a state of childhood to one of greater maturity. As a result, some childish assumptions have to be moderated, such as ‘I and my nation are always right,’ needs to become, ‘we, all of us on the planet, need to work together to solve this.’ And, consequently, any such social transition into such an unknown, results in “agonies.” In this process we will become more fully human.

Later in the poem, in section X (section III in *Angle of Ascent*), subtitled: “and all the atoms cry aloud,” not only is Bahá’u’lláh mentioned by name, but Bahá’í scripture is included as part of the text with no attribution.

The first line, and repeated two additional times in the poem, is a hidden, but recognizable reference to those familiar with Bahá’í prayers. It is a variation of the first line of a prayer frequently recited by Bahá’ís. The line in the prayer reads, “I bear witness, oh my God.”⁵⁰ In the poem, Hayden inverts this line and uses it to affirm his relationship to Bahá’u’lláh:

I bear Him witness now
Who by the light of suns beyond the suns beyond
the sun with shrill pen⁵¹.

And the “shrill pen” is introduced. This is an indirect allusion to Bahá’u’lláh and His writings.

In a Tablet He explained, “This Day is different from other days, and this Cause different from other causes. Entreat ye the one true God that He may deprive not the eyes of men from beholding His signs, nor their ears from hearkening unto the shrill voice of the Pen of Glory.”⁵² Despite the restrictions of His imprisonments and exiles, Bahá’u’lláh wrote a great volume of letters, most in answer to questions posed Him, as well as expositions and prayers all which constitute a portion of Bahá’í scripture.

The reference to use of the pen also applies to the followers of Bahá’u’lláh. He abrogated Holy War and urged instead: “If any man were to arise to defend, **in his writings**, the Cause of God against its assailants, such a man, however inconsiderable his share, shall be so honored in the world to come that the Concourse on high would envy his glory.”⁵³ (emphasis added) Thus, according to Bahá’í thought and practice, the pen truly is mightier than the sword.

In the sixth stanza Bahá’u’lláh is introduced by name and described:

Bahá’u’lláh,
Logos, poet, cosmic hero, surgeon, architect
of our hope of peace.⁵⁴

Each reference has a special significance:

- * Logos – the One who embodies the Word of God for the age the human race is now in.
- * Poet – much of His scripture was revealed and written in poetic form.
- * Cosmic hero – that His Message appeals to the entire universe of human beings. In less than two centuries people have come to the Bahá’í Faith from over 2100 different ethnic, religious, racial and national backgrounds; more than any other single group on the planet.
- * Surgeon – in that His Writings have eliminated, forbidden, or “cut out” from the Bahá’í community some social practices that have been well entrenched in human society yet hinder our progress. These include inequality between genders, inequality between races, slavery, begging, gossip, backbiting, use of alcohol, mind altering drugs, monasticism, confession, and clergy, among others.
- * Architect of our hope of peace – in the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh can be found an outline of a social framework where no individual or group has control or dominion over any others. It calls for a system of democratically elected councils at several levels of society with limits to the rights and responsibilities of each, as well as to the family and individual, so that none infringes on the other. Bahá’ís are attempting to implement these instructions in their own communities all around the world.

Bahá'u'lláh is also identified as, “Wronged, Exiled One,” references which are no longer hidden from the reader.

As the poem draws near to its conclusion a direct quote from Bahá'u'lláh is used. In it He describes the experience of receiving the first intimations of His role as a Messenger of God.

Hayden quotes:

I was but a man

like others, asleep upon

My couch, when, lo, the breezes of the All-Glorious
were wafted over Me.⁵⁵

There are no notes in the poem or the volume to indicate the source of the quote. This statement is found in several places in Bahá'í scripture. Bahá'u'lláh Himself states and repeats it in a letter to the son of a cleric who ordered the deaths of a great number of innocent people whose only crime was following the new religion. The English title of that letter as published is, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*. He also states and restates this in the section of Súrih-i-Haykal addressed to the Emperor of Persia, Násiríd-Dín Sháh.⁵⁶

An additional poem with a clear Bahá'í meaning, but unknown to those unfamiliar with the Bahá'í community, is ‘The Broken Dark.’ The dark of night is broken by the speaker’s wakefulness. He is in a hospital and confronts his own mortality. He sees death and demons in the unfamiliar shadows of the night and the moaning of a fellow patient. He “struggles in the pit” and lives to tell about it. “I have come back to tell thee of struggles in the pit.”⁵⁷

The poem closes on a positive note of thanks and gratitude to God:

Free of pain, my own death still
a theorem to be proved.

Allah'u'Abha. O Healing Spirit,
Thy nearness our forgiving cure.⁵⁸

The foreign phrase is an invocation to God, in Arabic, meaning “God is All-Glorious.”⁵⁹ The phrase is used among Bahá'ís as a greeting and invocation. The healing spirit of God is contrasted to death, which he has escaped.

A direct, and personal reference by Hayden to his faith, but hidden to those who do not know, is included in the closing stanza of the poem, written in honor of his grandson, Michael Ahmad Tedla, ‘Year of the Child,’ which appeared in *American Journal*. He expresses his concerns and

admiration like any grandfather who hopes for a better life for the coming generation and closes with a benediction:

May Huck and Jim
attend you. May you walk
with beauty before you,
beauty behind you, all
around you, and
The Most Great Beauty keep
you His concern.⁶⁰

The first sentence, as any American will know, refers to Huckleberry Finn and his runaway companion, the slave Jim, an interracial pair united forever in American literature symbolizing the freedom, defiance and adventure of childhood. The next three full lines and their reference to beauty may seem out of place to most readers, not part of the boyhood image evoked immediately before. One critic explained this “benedictive closing” as an eclectic fusion of secular wish, Navaho Indian song, and Bahá’í prayer.⁶¹ This is only partially accurate.

Knowledge of the Bahá’í Faith will confirm that beauty is an important theme in the religion. Beauty has an importance that is more than merely ornamental. In setting the style of the administrative structures at the Bahá’í World Center on Mt. Carmel in Haifa, Israel, the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith stated, “I will always sacrifice utility to beauty.”⁶² And the terraced gardens around those buildings up and down the mountain are now world renowned for their beauty.

But there is more to the reference than that.

The meaning of the reference to “The Most Great Beauty” is hidden to anyone unfamiliar with Bahá’í terminology. This is a direct reference to a title of the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá’í Faith: Bahá’u’lláh, meaning “the Glory of God.” Among His other titles are, The Most Great Beauty, The Ancient Beauty, the Blessed Beauty, and other similar appellations of beauty. Other references in poems to beauty, especially if capitalized, also refer to Bahá’u’lláh.⁶³

The benediction is given in hopes of divine protection for the infant since humans have been unable to protect other helpless ones in various parts of the world: South America, Africa, Europe, just a few of the places mentioned in the poem. In a spiritually and physically ugly world, the Beauty of God is implored.

Another poem with a hidden meaning, also appearing in *American Journal*, is ‘The Prisoners.’ The poet describes a visit to a prison, the characteristics of the prisoners, their reaction to his visit

and the actions of the visitor. The fifth stanza says:

We shared reprieving Hidden Words
revealed by the Godlike imprisoned
One, whose crime was truth.⁶⁴

Each one of these lines contains a hidden reference to some aspect of the Bahá'í Faith: “Hidden Words,” “Godlike imprisoned One,” and “whose crime was truth.” Each will be examined in turn.

The Hidden Words is a compilation of verses written by Bahá'u'lláh while He walked on the banks of the Tigris River in the late 1850s. This text distills the essence of religion, assisting the individual soul to become detached from this physical world and to protect the soul from its greatest enemy, the self. It has been called, “a mighty charter for the salvation of the human soul.”⁶⁵ This little volume is very likely the most treasured among all Bahá'í scriptures.

The “Godlike imprisoned One,” is clearly Bahá'u'lláh. “God-like,” in that He, according to Bahá'í belief, is the representative of God for this age. And He was imprisoned by the Persian and Ottoman authorities. He was a prisoner, exiled from place to place, the last forty years of His life. And what did He gain personally from His claim? Nothing. No security, no home, no income. One can easily wonder why He did not simply say, “I was wrong.” If he had, riches and honor would have been restored to Him and He could have lived a life of ease and pleasure. Every Manifestation of God has sacrificed His life for the well being and advancement of humanity and Bahá'u'lláh did the same. The suffering of each is testimony to Their claim.

As for the crime of truth, this is in contrast to the crimes of the prisoners being visited. Their crimes were carried out by:

hands intimate with knife and pistol,
hands that had cruelly grasped and throttled.⁶⁶

These were violent crimes against other persons. But the “crime of truth?”

The Persian government itself, at the time, in the official gazette *Ruznamiy-i-Vaqayi'-i-Ittifaqiyyih*, reported: “Amongst the Bábis who have fallen into the hands of justice, there are six whose culpability not having been well established, have been condemned to perpetual imprisonment.”⁶⁷ Among the six names was that of Bahá'u'lláh. It is odd to read now that there was not sufficient evidence to establish guilt so they were merely given a life sentence. If they had been found guilty, they would have been tortured and then executed.

The only “evidence” against Bahá’u’lláh was His allegiance to the Báb. At that time and place, yet still today, it is a “crime” to accept religious teachings different from that approved by contemporary authorities.

On the other hand, some say that Bahá’u’lláh’s crime of truth exposed the greed, venality and corruption of the Muslim religious establishment of the time. He later abolished the very institution of clergy for His followers. As hundreds and thousands deserted the mosques, the Muslim clergy intensified their opposition to His message. To this day Bahá’ís in Iran, and to a lesser extent other Muslim countries, have been blamed for the ills of society. This has been followed with imprisonment, torture and execution, or death due to mysterious circumstances.

The poem ends on a positive note, if one can say that, with a union of understanding between the prisoner being visited and the visitor, a bridge not yet attained in many other places:

“It’s like you been there, brother, been there
the scarred young lifer said.”⁶⁸.

It is interesting to note at least one instance where Hayden wrote into the fabric of a poem a caution from the Bahá’í teachings. This may be one of the most curious and hidden meanings of all. In the poem, ‘Aunt Jemima of the Ocean Waves,’ the main character tells about her early life and love:

The sweetest gentleman,
Dead before his time. Killed in the war
to save the world for another war.

High-stepping days for me
were over after that. Still I’m not one
to let grief idle me for long.
I went out with a mental act -

mind reading - Mysteria From
the Mystic East - veils and beads
and telling suckers how to get
stolen rings and sweethearts back.

One night he was standing by my bed,

seen him plain as I see you,
and warned me without a single word:
Baby, quit playing with that spiritual stuff.⁶⁹

This warning to, “quit playing with that spiritual stuff,” was one given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Head of the Bahá’í Faith, 1892-1921, and repeated later by the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith. It is not a denial of the spiritual realm, but a warning that those extra, paranormal, psychic abilities are not primarily for use or development in this physical plane. The Guardian instructed his secretary to write to an individual who inquired about this: “What ‘Abdu’l-Bahá always pointed out in this matter is that these psychic powers were not to be used in this world, and that indeed, it was dangerous to cultivate them here.”⁷⁰ These abilities are a natural and normal part of human makeup, but essentially for the next, non-physical world, not this physical one. What the danger is was not specified, but one can conclude that it will be obvious in the next world.

Equally as hidden, and without the normal clues, is a simple passing reference either to the Bahá’í Faith or Bahá’u’lláh Himself. It could be either. This found in the poem, ‘Stars.’ This five sectioned poem looks at stars from different perspectives. The first is that of a primitive tribesman giving praise to Orion, the hunter in the sky. The second is from a basis of scientific knowledge. Section three sees stars as guiding lights on the underground railroad to freedom. The final section refers to “the Nine-Pointed Star” of “the nuclear Will.” The use of capital letters, as stated earlier, is an indication of references to the Divine, which the final stanza confirms:

fixed star whose radiance
filtering down to us lights mind and
spirit, signals future light.⁷¹

Though minus capitalization, the reference is there, especially the inclusion of “spirit,” and “future light.” The last would refer to future Manifestations of God. Bahá’ís make no pretension of a claim to the finality of Revelation. In fact, Bahá’u’lláh clearly states that the will of the Creator has been revealed repeatedly to the human race since before the dawn of time and such revelations will continue into the future “to the end that hath no end.”⁷²

Bahá’ís often use a nine-pointed star, nine-petaled flower, or nine interlocking circles as a symbol of identity. A nine-pointed star is thus, a Bahá’í star. This utilization of nine-sided symbols, or the number nine, can be traced to early use of the Abjad system of giving a numerical value to letters of the alphabet. The Persian letters indicating the name of Bahá’u’lláh have the numerical value of nine.⁷³ As a result, the number nine was used as a code by early Bahá’ís, much as a fish

was used by early Christians. Nine, as the highest single digit, is also a symbol of unity. Bahá'í Houses of Worship have nine sides under one dome, demonstrating the many paths to the one Creator. Governing councils in the Bahá'í community have nine members. An incidental, but practical consequence of this is that the number eliminates the possibility of a deadlock when a vote is necessary to reach a decision; nine people voting cannot have a tie. On a historical note, it was nine years after the announcement of the Báb in Shiraz that Bahá'u'lláh received the first knowledge of His mission

‘As my Blood was Drawn’ is another poem with specific, but still somewhat hidden reference to the Bahá'í Faith. This time the reference is to “the People of Baha,” another designation for followers of Bahá'u'lláh. The poem compares the cancer the author learned was invading his body, and subsequent attempts to excise it, with the concurrent persecution of the Bahá'í community in Iran. This poem appeared in *American Journal*, first published in 1978, the first year of the most violent persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran in the twentieth century which has not yet ended. Since then hundreds of Bahá'ís have been murdered for their faith, corpses dug up from cemeteries which have then been bulldozed (others bulldozed with graves intact and homes constructed over them), houses and shops burned and bulldozed, employees fired, retirees denied their pensions (with repayment demanded), children harassed and expelled from school and students denied admission to university despite earning the highest test scores.

This poem begins:

As my blood was drawn,
as my bones were scanned,
the People of Baha
were savaged were slain.⁷⁴

and compares the cancer as an evil invading his body to the other destructive evil in Iran, just one example of the insanity rampant in the world.

The fourth stanza again relates his fate to that of the Bahá'ís in Iran where hundreds have been executed solely for their religious beliefs since the Islamic Revolution of the 1970s:

As surgeons put me to the knife,
innocents were sacrificed.⁷⁵

This is also one of the rare instances where Hayden uses a near rhyme. Generally his verse is completely unrhymed.

One of Hayden's last, as well as indirect, references to Bahá'í teachings occurs in the title poem

in *American Journal*. The narrator, an alien observing Earth and its inhabitants, reports to his superiors that among these strange beings:

many it appears worship the Unknowable
Essence the same for them as for us ⁷⁶.

This is the single commonality identified by the alien observer between at least some members of both planetary cultures. Both acknowledge a Something greater than themselves. In several places Bahá'í Scripture describes the Creator of all that is as an “unknowable Essence:”

To every discerning and illuminated heart it is evident that God, the unknowable Essence, the divine being is immensely exalted beyond every human attribute, such as corporeal existence, ascent and descent, egress and regress.⁷⁷

The Essence of belief in Divine unity consisteth in regarding Him Who is the Manifestation of God and Him Who is the invisible, the inaccessible, the unknowable Essence, as one and the same.⁷⁸

The birds of men's hearts, however high they soar, can never hope to attain the heights of His unknowable Essence.⁷⁹

Though some themes in Hayden's poetry did not change during his career, racial injustice, calling for equality and world brotherhood, the entire focus and nature of his work changed so much as to appear to be the voice of another person. As a poet confident of his voice he celebrated the diversity of the human race, calling the world to witness. The protest of his early years was transformed into a positive force for more inclusive ends. As his assurance grew, he more and more referred in hidden and more open ways to the source of his positive vision of the human race.

Do not limit him to being an African-American poet. He despised categories that divided people. He was a poet who sometimes wrote on themes from his heritage, some of which happened to be African-American, all infused by his faith.

Though Robert M Greenberg, a contributor to *African American Writers*, did acknowledge a few Bahá'í references in some of Hayden's work stating, “Words in the Mourning Time, part III, in *Angel of Ascent* (part X, in the *Collected Poems* version. Ed.), contains the most explicit treatment of Bahá'u'lláh as a reconciling and redeeming figure of our age.”⁸⁰ As we have seen, that is only half accurate and only hints at the depth of meaning hidden in Hayden's work. Further examination remained required which this essay attempts to fulfill.

It is logical to conclude that, due to the correspondence in time, when there was no other influence, it was the Bahá'í Revelation which channeled Hayden's early protest verse into

celebratory song. The timing of his conversion synchronizes with the time of change in his writing. The frequent allusions in his work after that time to that revelation are just hints of the source of that song. An exultant singer cannot hide the sources of his melody, but a poet, in Hayden's own words, will "Try to tell all the truth" but, in Emily Dickinson's phrase, "Tell it slant."⁸¹ And Hayden did just that. Such slant creates apparently hidden meanings but they will not long remain hidden.

Hayden's published volumes

- 1940 - *Heart-Shape in the Dust*, Detroit: Falcon Press.
- 1948 - *The Lion and the Archer*, Nashville: Hemphill Press
- 1955 - *Figure of Time*, Nashville: Hemphill Press.
- 1962 - *Ballad of Remembrance*, London: Paul Breman.
- 1966 - *Selected Poems*, New York: October House.
- 1967 - *Kaleidoscope* (ed.), New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- 1970 - *Words in the Mourning Time*, New York: October House.
- 1971 - *Afro-American Literature* (ed.), Orlando: Harcourt Brace Javanovich.
- 1972 - *Night-Blooming Cereus*, London: Paul Breman.
- 1973 - *American Models* (ed.), Glenview, IL: Foresman.
- 1974 - *Person, Place and Point of View* (ed.), Glenview, IL: Scott Foresman
- 1974 - *The Human Condition* (ed.), Glenveiw, IL: Scott Foresman
- 1975 - *Angle of Ascent*, New York: Liveright.
- 1978 - *The Legend of John Brown*, Detroit: Detroit Institute of Arts.
- 1978 - *American Journal*, Taunton: Effendi Press.
- 1982 - *American Journal* (expanded), New York: Liveright.
- 1984 - *Collected Prose*, New York: Liveright.
- 1985 - *Collected Poems*, New York: Liveright.

Notes:

Earlier versions and some sections of this essay have appeared in BAFA newsletters number 22 & 23 and ABS newsletter 41. The original version was written to satisfy requirements of EN: 385 (Directed Readings and Research) at Washburn University of Topeka, Kansas.

1. Roger M. Valad III, *The Essential Black Literature Guide* (Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 1996) p.172.
2. John Hatcher, *From the Auroral Darkness* (Oxford: George Ronald Publisher, 1984) p.13.
3. Ibid.
4. Arthur Davis, *From the Dark Tower: Afro-American Writers, 1900-1960* (Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1974) p.176.
5. Ibid.
6. Hatcher, p.96.
7. Insights from the Human DNA Sequence, US Department of Energy Genome Programs - Biological and Environmental Research Information System (BERIS), <http://genomics.energy.gov>
8. Bahá'í National Archives, Wilmette, IL, phone conversation with Archivist Roger Dahl, 13 May 1992.
9. Robert Hayden, 'From the Life: Some Remembrances,' unpublished autobiographical notes, The Hayden papers, Bahá'í National Archives, pp.15-16.
10. Gerald Parks, 'The Bahá'í Muse: Religion in Robert Hayden's Poetry,' *World Order*, 16, No. 1 (1981) p.38.
11. Ibid.
12. Chad Walsh, *Today's Poets: American and British Poetry since the 1930's* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, revised 1972) p.515.
13. Davis, p.177.
14. Phone conversation with John Hatcher, biographer of Robert Hayden, author of *From the Auroral Darkness*, 15 April 1992.
15. Mark 1:17
16. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í Prayers* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982) p.180.
17. Hayden, Dawnbreaker, *Selected Poems*, p.16; *Angle of Ascent*, p.39; and *Collected Poems*, p.69.
18. Shoghi Effendi, trans, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p.620. The transmission of the account was meticulously noted: "Among those who, in the midst of the general confusion, were seized and thrown into prison was Haji Sulayman Khan, the circumstances of whose martyrdom I now proceed to relate. The facts I mention have been carefully sifted and verified by me, and I owe them, for the most part, to Aqay-i-Kalim, who was himself in those days in Tihiran and was made to share the terrors and sufferings of his brethren. On the very day of Haji Sulayman Khan's martyrdom," he

informed me, "I happened to be present, with Mirza Abdu'l-Majid, at a gathering in Tihran at which a considerable number of the notables and dignitaries of the capital were present. Among them was Haji Mulla Mahmud, the Nizamu'l-'Ulama, who requested the Kalantar to describe the actual circumstances of the death of Haji Sulayman Khan. The Kalantar motioned with his finger to Mirza Taqi, the kadkhuda who, he said, had conducted the victim from the vicinity of the imperial palace to the place of his execution, outside the gate of Naw. Mirza Taqi was accordingly requested to relate to those present all that he had seen and heard." *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp.616-617.

19. Hayden, 'Dawnbreaker.'

20. Chad Walsh, 'Robert Hayden, The Poet and His Art: A conversation,' *How I Write* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972) p.209.

21. Hayden, 'Full Moon,' *Ballad of Remembrance*, p. 6; *Selected Poems* (New York: October House, 1966) p.15; *Angle of Ascent* (New York: Liveright, 1975) p.79; and *Collected Poems* (New York: Liveright, 1985) p.7.

22. Walsh, 'Robert Hayden,' p.209.

23. Hayden, 'From the Corpse Woodpile, From the Ashes,' *Selected Poems*, p.60; *Angle of Ascent*, p.116; and *Collected Poems*, p.46.

24. Wendi Momen, ed., *A Basic Bahá'í Dictionary* (Oxford: George Ronald Publisher, 1989) p.190; and Dr. David S. Ruhe, *Robe of Light: the Persian Years of the Supreme Prophet Bahá'u'lláh: 1817-1853* (Oxford: George Ronald Publisher, 1994) note p.141.

25. Ruhe, p.141.

26. Shoghi Effendi, trans., Nabil-i-A'zam (Muhammad-i-Zarandi'), *The Dawn-Breakers - Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1932) pp.631-132.

27. Hayden, 'Night-Blooming Cereus,' *Angle of Ascent*, p.24-26; *Collected Poems*, pp.114-116.

28. "The holy Manifestations of God come into the world to dispel the darkness of the animal or physical nature of man, to purify him from his imperfections in order that his heavenly and spiritual nature may become quickened, his divine qualities awakened, his perfections visible, his potential powers revealed and all the virtues of the world of humanity latent within him may come to life." 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundations of Divine Unity* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1945) p.110.

29. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitab-i-Iqan: the Book of Certitude* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1950) p.176-177.

30. Hatcher, p.185.

31. Ibid. p.327, note 12.
32. Pontheolla Williams, *Robert Hayden: A Critical Analysis of His Poetry* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987) p.136.
33. Hayden, 'Night-Blooming Cereus.'
34. Hatcher, pp. 184-185.
- 3 5. Matthew 24:42, *The Amplified Bible: The New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963) p.38.
36. Mark 13:36, *ibid.* p.72.
37. Luke 21: 36, *ibid.* p.123-124.
38. Elise Paschen and Rebeckah Mosby, eds., *Poetry Speaks: hear great poets read their work from Tennyson to Plath* (Naperville, Ill: Sourcebooks, 2001) p.199.
39. Marzieh Gail, *Bahá'í Glossary: A Glossary of Persian and Arabic Words Appearing in the Bahá'í Writings* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1955) p.42.
40. Peter Smith, *A Concise Encyclopedia of the Bahá'í Faith* (Oxford: One World, 2000) p.296-297.
41. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1944) p.151.
42. *ibid.* p.902.
43. Hayden, 'Bahá'u'lláh in the Garden of Ridwan,' *Selected Poems*, p.61; *Angle of Ascent*, p.117; and *Collected Poems*, p.47.
44. Hayden, 'Words in the Mourning Time,' *Words in the Mourning Time*, p.41; *Angle of Ascent*, p.59; and *Collected Poems*, p.90.
45. Tens of thousands of individual documents exist written by Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá which are considered scripture by members of the Bahá'í Faith. Most were letters sent to individuals or groups of individuals though some are larger expositions. These, or authenticated copies, are currently being gathered at the Bahá'í World Center in Haifa, Israel for compilation, translation, and publication. Because the number is continually increasing as documents are found that had been hidden for their safety, the totals are not static. In 1989 a researching scholar noted about 64,000 by Bahá'u'lláh and 37,000 'Abdu'l-Bahá in addition to transcriptions of His talks. The number of writings of the Báb are significantly less, but the total is still significant. See: Margit Warburg, *Citizens of the World: A History and Sociology of the Baha'is from a Globalisation Perspective* (Lieden: Brill, 2001) p.441.
46. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1955)

p.43.

47. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in *ibid.* p.35.

48. Shoghi Effendi (trans), Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words of Bahá’u’lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1954) p.11

49. Hayden, *Words in the Mourning Time*.

50. Bahá’u’lláh, et al, *Bahá’í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Báb* (Wilmette, Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 2002) p.4.

51. *Words in the Mourning Time*.

52. Bahá’u’lláh quoted in, Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1952) p.66.

“Shrill pen” has two rather obvious meanings. One is the actual sound of the pen used in those times. It scratched across paper and different writers could cause a range of sounds, some of them quite shrill. The other would be the intensity of God’s call to humanity in this day.

53. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, CLIV, (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1952) p.330.

54. *Words in the Mourning Time*.

55. *Ibid.*

56. Bahá’u’lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (Wilmette, Bahá’í Publishing Trust 1953) pp.11 & 39, and Bahá’u’lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts: Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* (Haifa: Bahá’í World Center, 2002) pp.98 & 129. Bahá’u’lláh further describes this experience, saying, “One night, in a dream, these exalted words were heard on every side: ‘Verily, We shall render Thee victorious by Thyself and by Thy Pen. Grieve Thou not for that which hath befallen Thee, neither be Thou afraid, for Thou art in safety.’” *Epistle*, p.21.

57. Hayden, ‘The Broken Dark,’ *Words in the Mourning Time*, p.15; *Angle of Ascent*, p.39; and *Collected Poems*, p.69.

58. *ibid.*

59. Wendi Momen, ed., *A Basic Bahá’í Dictionary*, p.15.

60. Hayden, ‘Year of the Child,’ *American Journal* (New York: Liveright, 1982) p.43-44; *Collected Poems*, p.179.

61. Fred M. Fetrow, *Robert Hayden* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984) p.128.

62. Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánúm, 'The Completion of the International Archives,' *The Bahá'í World: An International Record, Vol. XIII, 1954-1963* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Center, 1970) p.424.
63. Rúhíyyih Rabbani, *The Desire of the World: Material for the contemplation of God and His Manifestation for this Day* (Oxford: George Ronald Publisher, 1982) pp.177-186.
64. Hayden, 'The Prisoners,' *American Journal*, p.18; *Collected Poems*, p.159.
65. Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh: Baghdad, 1853-63* (Oxford: George Ronald Publisher, 1974) p.75
66. Hayden, 'The Prisoners.'
67. Moojan Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions 1844-1944, Some Contemporary Western Accounts* (Oxford: George Ronald Publisher) p.141. The original news article was sent to the French Foreign Office on 25 October 1852 and translated by J.B. Nichols. Nichols reproduced the original and a translation in Seyyed Ali Muhammad which became the source for journalists and others. Here it is reproduced from *Queer things about Persia* by Eustache de Lorey and Douglas Sladen. Momen clarified some details from the original Persian.
68. Hayden, 'The Prisoners.'
69. Hayden, 'Aunt Jemima of the Ocean Waves,' *Words in the Mourning Time* (New York: October House, 1970) p.18; *Angle of Ascent* p.43; and *Collected Poems* p.72.
70. Shoghi Effendi through his secretary to an individual, 4 March 1946, in Helen Hornby, *Lights of Guidance, A Bahá'í Reference File* (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983) p.387.
71. Hayden, 'Stars V,' *Angle of Ascent* p.15; and *Collected Poems* p.134.
72. "It is for this very purpose that in every age and dispensation the Prophets of God and His chosen Ones have appeared amongst men, and have evinced such power as is born of God and such might as only the Eternal can reveal.... For this reason, from the beginning that hath no beginning the portals of Divine mercy have been flung open to the face of all created things, and the clouds of Truth will continue to the end that hath no end to rain on the soil of human capacity, reality and personality their favors and bounties." *Gleanings XXVII*, p.68.
73. Wendy Momen, *A Basic Bahá'í Dictionary* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1989) p.5-6; Peter Smith; *A Concise Encyclopedia of the Bahá'í Faith* (Oxford, Oneworld, 2000) pp.21-22.
74. Hayden, 'As my Blood was Drawn,' *American Journal* p.40; *Collected Poems* p.176.
75. Ibid.
76. Hayden, 'American Journal,' *American Journal* p.57; *Collected Poems* p.192.

77. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude* p.98. This statement was also selected to be included in the compilation, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p.46. If a reader misses it in one, he will find it in the other.

78. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* LXXXIV, p.167.

79. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* XCIV, p.193.

80. Robert M. Greenburg, 'Robert Hayden: 1913-1980,' *African American Writers: Profiles of their lives and works - from the 1700s to the present* (New York: Collier's Books, 1993) p.155.

81. *How I Write*, p.167.