Stained Glass Speaks

For/After Robert Hayden

[BREED]

Deliver me and my mouth deliver me and my shadow's poise

my fearful quiet yawning holy structure—failure

dismember me and my commodity-identity-history: another busted hull tilted toward the sky—

flotsam of belonging scudding this way and that in the warm tide

this tethered riot this anthem this hazardous life full of whys in its waves

so that the brittle and backlit curse lifted up [is that what we be?] might be

shattered into tongues might become collision unmeasured in shards that teem

like water – so bright that broken glass falling might be the chorus finding

its scarlet rhythm – the confluence of each voiced lie and love [ain't we always in between?] as they gush

then mist into the air, misremembered—over the edge of how, the throat of no

[HARD TEAR]

Tremor in the diamond memory

a needle dipped in music

more than muscle more than blood: helpless, contagious. Sing: sink where we believe.

Each mind inside mine a wide-eyed scale on the sleek dark flank of history:

the exotic beast turns, rises on its haunches, bleets, spews ecstasy and anxiety in order

to drown the empires in their continents as they thrash and spread—who's

surprised by the sharpness of mouths how they cut through belief?

[TAR]

What can I do but enter naked now and lie down

in this raw lair of nectar and threat,

sicksweet amalgam

of shifting

heaving

borders, once again my blackpatterned 200 plus pounds 6-foot self conjuring swollen roots that roam forever

beneath us beneath sky

cored through

the deep work of what I am—

what you are—in spite of

ourselves

we swallow something

other than air-

[don't forget

to breathe] whose harsh blued angle of each america in us

[TORN CORE]

Naked we stood and watched The honeybee

Fling itself against the dirty glass Window in the shower

For what felt like hours, but it had to Be less than even one

Before it drowned in the steam Or just got tired, spilling

Down, swiped tiny paws not paws, Soft, in our eyes, and slippery

Against the chipped wooden border. Our Sex at rest a different kind

Of body open. You tried, I tried, To gently touch and bend

Our body over, to keep going but I Kept listening for its buzzing

Until one of us got out. Then both.

[TREACHERY]

There is a [n open] door.

[DARE]

Awake and made in air, I leave

the branches, the seashore, the other spirits living

silent and long. A reflection

blinded,

set boldly, a bower

jewel and drum

and home. I am

my country, a wind stumbling

above Columbus, a palm

beyond ashes anchors

my return. I chose this

night boat adrift on yesterday,

decay, and memory.

Forgot I had

gathered pilgrimed sand

in my dark hands

from men whose May

may shatter me. Still. Hallelujah

fluttering from the crimson

fringes of my earth,

weary,

singing sleet.

[SEED]

skin the wet color of ghost-ripped trees

their fog their lilt

[bet]ween me.

[REACH]

Would you believe me if I warned you I'm dangerous? Do you think you would agree when I say I'm never certain, always plural, and no longer care to know? I spend my lives looking

at you, aiming to believe. You comment on my eyes, the shape of them, and I wonder where I learned to hide. Or is it instinct? The unlearned unleashed. The pull pushed back. Faith spun

the roots that keep the leaves. Gaunt flags of seaweed in the hoary Atlantic sing our [nightgreen] song of to and fro. Painting wave after wave, steadily willing. Down here. Where all roots look alien to me.

There's foreign and then there's unknown— There's fear and then there's the dark.