

## **Angle of Ascent**

(for Robert Hayden)

We speak in whispers when we speak at all

Robert and I

Two minor Wallendas ( but Wallendas all the

Same),

A valued old man

Pumping pigeon's milk instead of blood and I

A bloodless wingless wonder

Sharing the tightness of

Our

Platform.

Looking down we cannot see

Our starting place.

Once in the wind

Behind us,

Before us becomes phantom territory

We speak in whispers when we speak at all

Radar corollas, Holland tulips, elms, ailanthus,

Rosebuds, upas trees, even night-blooming cereus

And Monet's "Water lilies" become

Red corollas, Honda civics, and K-cars

With here and there a silver

Or two-tone Cadillac.

The Zulu-King and Gun-Metal Priestess, Quadroon

Mermaids, black saints and Afro Angels

Are all here tonight, dressed to kill in their finest rainbow shades,

Not to hoodoo tonight

But to help chant this poem

Of remembrance, this gift, a souvenir for you.

O Daedalus, fly away home.

We speak in whispers when we speak at all.

Phoenix, I have watched you become more than you had time to be.

Neither b-boy nor storyteller

You have sifted to the mathematics of your message

And your death remains the only theorem still

To be proved.

Reflecting Him or Her who decides the difference

Between heavenly design and chance, you,

With your colors so intense I imagine them as heavy,

Leave the platform

And disappear into your name

Through the blue door and into the Peacock Room.

Daedalus, fly away home.

We speak in whispers when we speak at all.

Kumokums, Zeus, Brahma,

Buddha, Yahweh, Ra, Allah alone has 99 names but there is

No god but God.

La ilaha illa'llah.

There is no god but God.

Talk to Stone with her cod grey anger

Pr to Wheat, yellow with his pride

To a child, who questions

Without speaking a name

And ask to be named again.

Phoenix –

No more the mask

But now, the acrobat

A youthful occupation at best,

And you a valued old man.

Art5 is long, life too short to believe in supply and demand.

We speak in whispers when we speak at all,

Two minor Wallendas (but Wallendas all the

Same),

A naked old man

With bloodstained wings and searching eyes

And I, the Wingless Wonder, [repairing to Triple Summersault) .

The angle of ascent achieved –

A silken rustling, and –

I eat the air.

## Blues Suite/Suite Blues I

*And so, I missed my chance with one of the lords*

*Of life.*

*And I have something to expiate;*

*A pettiness.*

- Excerpt from "Snake" by D.H. Lawrence

There's a great big mystery

Surely worrin me

I got a great big mystery

And it's surely worrin me

It's this diddie wah diddie thing

It's this diddie wah diddie thing

I sure wish somebody tell me what diddie wah diddie means

I got the black snake moan

I got the pig meat holla

I got my mojo workin

Nose wide open

Hot under the collar

I sure wish somebody tell me what diddie wah diddie mean

I got a brown cross town

She sure is good to me

I got this Coke-frame brown cross town

Who's taller than a sycamore tree

Y'know she says she'll walk thru rain or snow

For to ease my diddie wah diddie for me

I sure wish somebody tell what diddie wah diddie mean

I got the meat shakes on the bone

Got the long-distance moan

I got the key on my hip

But the lock don't fit

I sure wish somebody tell me

I sure wish somebody tell me

I sure wish somebody tell me what diddie wah diddie mean

Make me a pallet baby

Make me a pallet on your floor

Make me a pallet baby

Over there by the kitchen door

When your man comes home I swear he'll never know

You cooked some diddy wah diddy when your spirit was low

I sure wish somebody tell me

I sure wish somebody tell me

I sure wish somebody tell me what diddie wah diddie mean

I'm a hoochie-koochie man

I'm a little boy blue

You can tell by the way I smell

I'll be real good for you

I got a hip-shakin strut

I'm a mean Mistreater Man

I need one hungry gal

Who'll teach me if she can what diddie wah diddie

Diddie wah diddie

Diddie wah diddie

What it mean

I went to the church

Put my hand on the seat

Lady sat on it, said "Daddy, you sure are sweet,

Mr. Diddie Wah Diddie

Mr. Diddie Wah Diddie"

I wish somebody could tell me what diddie wah diddie mean

## Sally Saves

Sally saves sponges

Has no time but has

Three broken watches which

She carries in her Macy's shopping bag

Along with yesterday's New York Times

She begs for her breakfast

Sleeps in the street

But uses the bathroom in Bloomingdales

Flat Iron Alley behind Sterling Steet, East Baltimore, Maryland

(for Roland L. Freeman)

Pulling self to work this daybreak

Tugging the freshly-starched collar of his white shirt

The Araber makes the turn-off from the Twentieth Century

And into Flat Iron Alley.

Everything looks as it should;

Dirt fighting with chunks of cobblestone for space

Grass growing thru cracks in the cement blocks,

Makes him pause with causal recognition and catch his breath.

Being the last to arrive, he notices

The doors of the rust=red brick stalls left open.

The others have, as usual,

Beaten him to the streets

Ourtracing Father Time himself

On their horse-drawn carriages

Laden with crates of Rita Bananas

Gunn's Georgia Peaches and Barbara Lee's Grapes.

Red to the rind,

Come lady!

I got'em red to the rind today!

Big , ripe, red, juicy

Watermelons whole!

I got'em red



Watermelon whole!

I got'em, you want'em, come get'em!

I got'em red to the rind today!

He chuckles

Remembering an Araber

Singing that cry or something similar.

He'd been a stable boy here.

Now he was an Araber

So much of life

Spent in the alley

Or returning to it.

He reflectively rubs, then

Cracks his huge fingers,

Wipes clean hands against dungaree, and

Feeling nothing new

Through leather-like palms,

Tugs again his collar and tottles forward –

Stopping short –

The sudden motion splashing

A puddle of rain water and dew against his

Left leg. Looking

Down, he watches the ripples run from beneath

His Lil' Abners.

He raises his eyes again to his horse.

This animal had grown old with him.

Mane, silver-grey, unkempt,  
Body still seemingly powerful and supple  
Though already rigid and cold.  
She'd clopped from her cell and  
Fallen over a wooden wheel propped  
Against a door. Someone had covered her with a small,  
Faded blue quilt.  
Eyes stare in black remembrance.  
Mouth opens with both grimace and smile.

White potatoes,  
Sweet potatoes,  
Collard greens and apples!  
Red, ripe tomatoes  
Hey, the peaches are  
Almost all sold!  
The peaches are  
Almost all sold.

The Araber lets loose a deep, whistling breath,  
Rubs his hands against the harshness of his dungarees,  
Tugs his collar,  
Turns into a corner  
A private space  
To take a leak.