

## Opening Excerpt from Robert Hayden, “Middle Passage” (1962)

*Jesús, Estrella, Esperanza, Mercy:*

Sails flashing to the wind like weapons,  
sharks following the moans the fever and the dying;  
horror the corposant and compass rose.

Middle Passage:

voyage through death  
to life upon these shores.

“10 April 1800—  
Blacks rebellious. Crew uneasy. Our linguist says  
their moaning is a prayer for death,  
ours and their own. Some try to starve themselves.  
Lost three this morning leaped with crazy laughter  
to the waiting sharks, sang as they went under.”

*Desire, Adventure, Tartar, Ann:*

Standing to America, bringing home  
black gold, black ivory, black seed.

*Deep in the festering hold thy father lies,  
of his bones New England pews are made,  
those are altar lights that were his eyes.*

Jesus Saviour Pilot Me  
Over Life's Tempestuous Sea

We pray that Thou wilt grant, O Lord,  
safe passage to our vessels bringing  
heathen souls unto Thy chastening.

<https://blogs.dickinson.edu/fys-pinsker/texts/robert-hayden-middle-passage-1945-1962/>