



*John Berryman*

**77 DREAM SONGS**

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**by John Berryman**

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**Designed by Guy Fleming**

*To Kate, and to Saul*

**'THOU DREWEST NEAR IN THE DAY'**

**‘GO IN, BRACK MAN, DE DAY’S YO’ OWN.’**

**. . . I AM THEIR MUSICK.**

*Lam. 3:63*

**BUT THERE IS ANOTHER METHOD.**

*Olive Schreiner*

*Note:* THESE ARE SECTIONS, constituting one version, of a poem in progress. Its working title, since 1955, has been *The Dream Songs*. One is dedicated (2) to the memory of Daddy Rice who sang and jumped 'Jim Crow' in Louisville in 1828 (London, 1836 and later), and others to friends: Robert Giroux (7), John Crowe Ransom (11), Howard Munford (24), Ralph Ross (27), Robert Fitzgerald (34), Daniel Hughes (35), William Meredith (36), the Theodore Morrisons and the Chisholm Gentrys (37-38-39), Dr A. Boyd Thomes (54), Edmund and Elena Wilson (58), George Amberg (63), Mark Van Doren (66), Allen and Isabella Tate (70), Saul Bellow (75). The editors directing certain journals have been hospitable to some of the Songs here brought together: *The Times Literary Supplement*, *The Noble Savage*, *The Observer*, *Poetry*, *Partisan Review*, *Encounter*, *Poetry Northwest*, *The New York Review of Books*, *The New Republic*, *Minnesota Review*, *Harpers*, *Ramparts*, *The Yale Review*, *The Kenyon Review*. Many opinions and errors in the Songs are to be referred not to the character Henry, still less to the author, but to the title of the work.

J.B.

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**I**



Huffy Henry hid the day,  
unappeasable Henry sulked.  
I see his point,—a trying to put things over.  
It was the thought that they thought  
they could *do* it made Henry wicked & away.  
But he should have come out and talked.

All the world like a woolen lover  
once did seem on Henry's side.  
Then came a departure.  
Thereafter nothing fell out as it might or ought.  
I don't see how Henry, pried  
open for all the world to see, survived.

What he has now to say is a long  
wonder the world can bear & be.  
Once in a sycamore I was glad  
all at the top, and I sang.  
Hard on the land wears the strong sea  
and empty grows every bed.

## *Big Buttons, Cornets: the advance*

The jane is zoned! no nightspot here, no bar  
there, no sweet freeway, and no premises  
for business purposes,  
no loiterers or needers. Henry are  
baffled. Have ev'ybody head for Maine,  
utility-man take a train?

Arrive a time when all coons lose dere grip,  
but is he come? Le's do a hoedown, gal,  
one blue, one shuffle,  
if them is all you seem to réquire. Strip,  
ol banger, skip us we, sugar; so hang on  
one chaste evenin.

—Sir Bones, or Galahad: astonishin  
yo legal & yo good. Is you feel well?  
Honey dusk do sprawl.  
—Hit's hard. Kinged or thinged, though, fling & wing.  
Poll-cats are coming, hurrah, hurray.  
I votes in my hole.

## *A Stimulant for an Old Beast*

Acacia, burnt myrrh, velvet, prickly stings.

—I'm not so young but not so very old,  
said screwed-up lovely 23.

A final sense of being right out in the cold,  
unkissed.

(—My psychiatrist can lick your psychiatrist.) Women get under  
things.

All these old criminals sooner or later  
have had it. I've been reading old journals.

Gottwald & Co., out of business now.

Thick chests quit. Double agent, Joe.

She holds her breath like a seal  
and is whiter & smoother.

Rilke was a *jerk*.

I admit his griefs & music

& titled spelled all-disappointed ladies.

A threshold worse than the circles  
where the vile settle & lurk,

Rilke's. As I said,—

Filling her compact & delicious body  
with chicken páprika, she glanced at me  
twice.

Fainting with interest, I hungered back  
and only the fact of her husband & four other people  
kept me from springing on her

or falling at her little feet and crying  
'You are the hottest one for years of night  
Henry's dazed eyes  
have enjoyed, Brilliance.' I advanced upon  
(despairing) my spumoni. —Sir Bones: is stuffed,  
de world, wif feeding girls.

—Black hair, complexion Latin, jewelled eyes  
downcast . . . The slob beside her     feasts . . . What wonders is  
she sitting on, over there?

The restaurant buzzes. She might as well be on Mars.  
Where did it all go wrong? There ought to be a law against Henry.  
—Mr. Bones: there is.

Henry sats in de bar & was odd,  
 off in the glass from the glass,  
 at odds wif de world & its god,  
 his wife is a complete nothing,  
 St Stephen  
 getting even.

Henry sats in de plane & was gay.  
 Careful Henry nothing said aloud  
 but where a Virgin out of cloud  
 to her Mountain dropt in light,  
 his thought made pockets & the plane buckt.  
 'Parm me, lady.' 'Orright.'

Henry lay in de netting, wild,  
 while the brainfever bird did scales;  
 Mr Heartbreak, the New Man,  
 come to farm a crazy land;  
 an image of the dead on the fingernail  
 of a newborn child.



## *A Capital at Wells*

During the father's walking—how he look  
down by now in soft boards, Henry, pass  
and what he feel or no, who know?—  
as during his broad father's, all the breaks  
& ill-lucks of a thriving pioneer  
back to the flying boy in mountain air,

Vermont's child to go out, and while Keats sweat'  
for hopeless inextricable lust, Henry's fate,  
and Ethan Allen was a calling man,  
all through the blind one's dream of the start,  
when Day was killing Porter and had to part  
lovers for ever, fancy if you can,

while the cardinals' guile to keep Aeneas out  
was failing, while in some hearts Chinese doubt  
inscrutably was growing, toward its end,  
and a starved lion by a water-hole  
clouded with gall, while Abelard was whole,  
these grapes of stone were being proffered, friend.