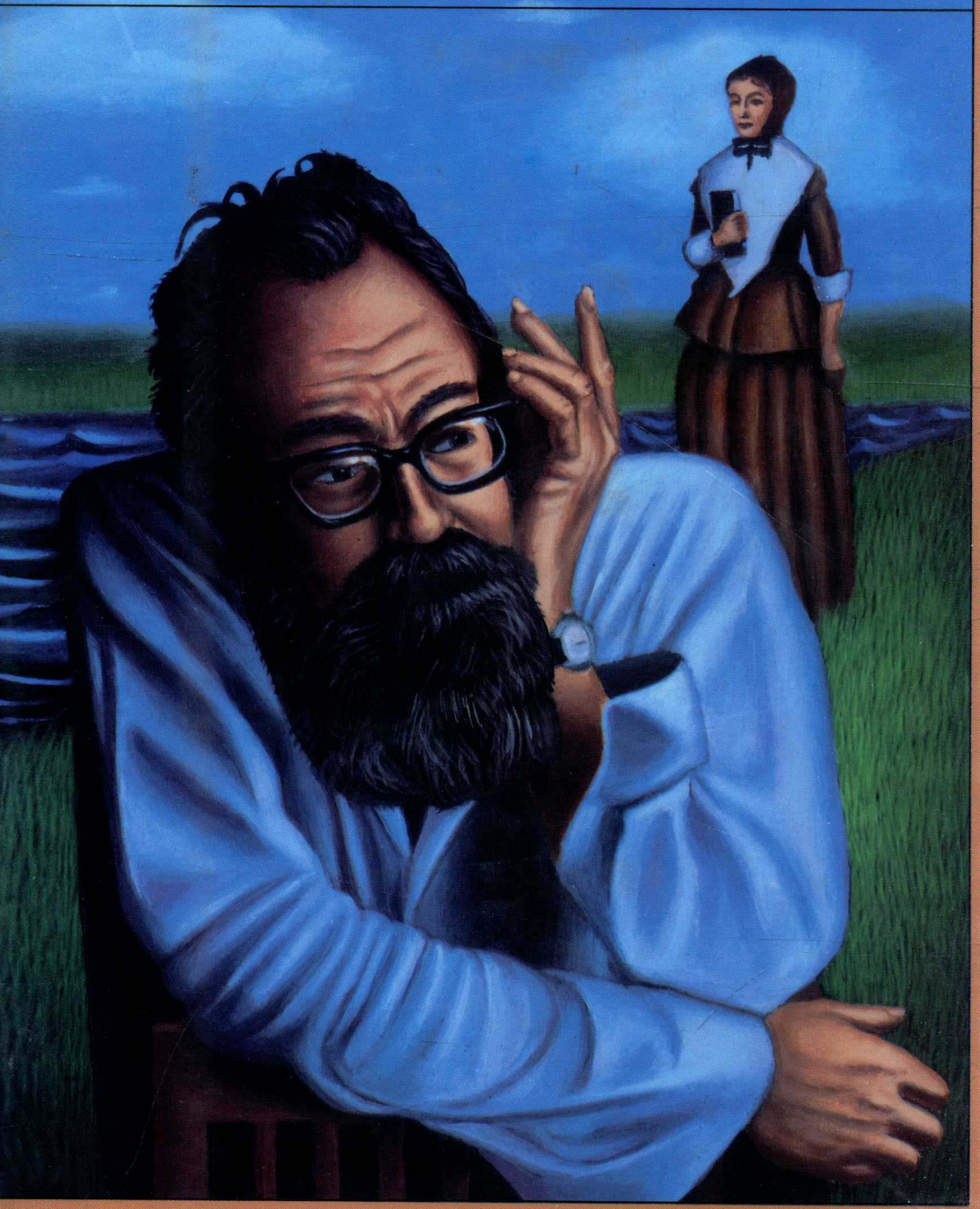
Modern Critical Views

JOHN BERRYMAN

Edited and with an Introduction by
HAROLD BLOOM



Modern Critical Views

JOHN BERRYMAN

Edited and with an introduction by

Harold Bloom
Sterling Professor of the Humanities
Yale University

CHELSEA HOUSE PUBLISHERS
New York ◊ Philadelphia

Printed and bound in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
John Berryman.
(Modern critical views)
Bibliography: p.
Includes index.
1. Berryman, John, 1914–1972—Criticism and
interpretation. I. Bloom, Harold. II. Series.
PS3503.E744Z597 1988 811'.54 87–27728
ISBN 1-55546-310-X

Editor's Note

This book brings together a representative selection of the best criticism available upon the writings of the American poet John Berryman. The critical essays are reprinted here in the chronological order of their original publication. I am grateful to Bruce Covey for his assistance in editing this volume.

My introduction ponders the influence relation between W. B. Yeats and Berryman. William Wasserstrom begins the chronological sequence of criticism with a deeply informed overview of Berryman's poetic career, from its sources to its achieved shamanistic stance. In another generous survey, the Irish critic Denis Donoghue praises *The Dream Songs* as "all perception, surrounded by feeling."

Ernest C. Stefanik defends *Love & Fame* as a pilgrimage from despair to "Christian acceptance," while David Kalstone describes *Recovery,* Berryman's only novel, as a "harrowing departure" because it seems to divorce "exposure, truth about the self" from "literary merit."

The Dream Songs are judged by Edward Mendelson to "remain the most courageous and interesting poetic experiment of their decade," while the Oxford critic John Bayley goes further and joins Berryman to Robert Lowell as poets exercising imperial sway. Somewhat less imperially, Joel Conarroe writes a deft appreciation of *Love & Fame* and *Delusions, Etc.* In Diane Ackerman's briefer appreciation, Berryman is praised for "the courage to face ontological precipices."

Jerome Mazzaro, blending erudition and insight, arrives at a balanced view of both the Yeatsian and Freudian aspects of Berryman. *Berryman's Sonnets,* a problematic work in his development, are read by David K. Weiser as the representation of "an underlying conflict between inner impulses and outer norms." In this book's final essay, Elizabeth Kaspar Aldrich brilliantly interprets *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet* as Berryman's great crisis-poem, commemorating a poetic crisis she judges him to have surmounted.

Contents

Introduction

"I began work in verse-making as a burning, trivial disciple of the great Irish poet William Butler Yeats, and I hope I have moved off from there." That is John Berryman in 1965, and he added: "Then came Yeats, whom I didn't so much wish to resemble as to *be.*" Then came Auden, by Berryman's own testimony. "Winter Landscape" was cited by Berryman as his first poem in his own voice, and *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet* as his true breakthrough. That there are breakthroughs in the development or unfolding of a strong poet cannot be denied; the burden for literary criticism always must be to determine which poets inevitably compel the canon to make place for them. Roethke in his two best volumes achieved strength and then fell away from it. Robert Lowell, concerning whom I seem to be the only dissenter in our nation, did not achieve it, either in the manner of Eliot and Tate, or in that of W. C. Williams. Berryman I find the largest puzzle of his poetic generation, though I believe he will be judged at last only by *The Dream Songs.* To compare them, as some admirers do, to *Song of Myself,* is palpably an error; they are neither of that mode nor anywhere close to that astonishing eminence.

Berryman, like Lowell, continues to be overpraised in Britain, where both are associated with Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath. This is hardly fair to Berryman, but British critics such as John Bayley and A. Alvarez seem to like their American poets to be suicidal, mentally ill, and a touch unruly, "beyond the Gentility Principle," as Alvarez phrases it. Wallace Stevens, in the judgment of Bayley, is inferior to Berryman and Lowell, which is roughly akin to my proclaiming that Alice Meynell and Charlotte Mew wrote better poems than Thomas Hardy, which I am not about to proclaim. Perhaps Berryman has some permanent poems, but they are hard to locate if you start out with his admirers' hyperbolical guides, which have little actual relation to the terrain of the work itself.

Yeats never left Berryman, who made extraordinary efforts to stop *sounding* like Yeats. That is a perfectly normal procedure in severe cases of poetic influence; Browning's remarkable diction and syntax resulted from his need to stop being Shelley, and the Browning dramatic monologue, with its purported objectivity, was a swerve away from the flamboyant subjectivity of the Shelleyan lyric, or the autobiographical romance of the *Alastor* variety. It would be wonderful if Berryman had become the American Browning, but alas he did not. *The Dream Songs* are not *Men and Women*, and *Love & Fame* is not *Asolando*. In the spirit of having named Lowell as our William Mason, and Plath as our Felicia Hemans, I could call Berryman our "Festus" Bailey or our Alexander Smith, creator of that other masterpiece of the Spasmodic School, *A Life Drama*. Berryman's similarity to Bailey and Smith is quite uncanny, and like Mason and Hemans in their eras, the Spasmodics had critical admirers as profusely enthusiastic as Alvarez, Bayley, Mendelson, and other loyal Berrymanians. Contemporary acclaim is sometimes a very bad indication of a poet's future canonicity.

The poem by Berryman I love best is the proper answer to me, or to anyone else who has the temerity to worry the issue of poetic survival. Here is the last stanza of his superb "A Professor's Song":

> Alive now-no-Blake would have written prose,
> But movement following movement crisply flows,
> So much the better, better the much so,
> As burbleth Mozart. Twelve. The class can go.
> Until I meet you, then, in Upper Hell
> Convulsed, foaming immortal blood: farewell.

Yes, yes indeed, a more than palpable hit, but there precisely is the maddening and necessary question: among the poets, whose blood is immortal? No one likes the question, poets least of all, but it has to be asked, and answered. The cost of belatedness is not a shrinking of literary space, but of the reader's time. I have had the experience of being denounced in this regard, in print and out, by a vociferous bevy of literary journalists, inchoate rhapsodes, and academic impostors, but they too must choose whom they will read in the time they have, and even they must recognize that we cannot reread everyone. Berryman's poetry does not repress this dilemma, no poetry wholly can, however implicitly the sorrow is addressed, and Berryman, even more than most of his contemporaries, was obsessed with this burden. Elizabeth Kaspar Aldrich is particularly shrewd in noting how central this anxiety was to Berryman's imagination. She quotes his splendid remark, from the same 1965 interview that acknowledged the influence of Yeats and Auden:

"A poem's force may be pivoted on a missing or misrepresented element in an agreed-upon or imposed design." Someone indeed is always missing, or misrepresented. Aldrich, who loves *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet* more than I do, though I must acknowledge it an ambitious and admirable poem, catches the precise function of crossing over that it fulfilled:

> The "more" that Berryman's poem attempts seems to me, finally, a foredoomed willing-into-being of a burdensome past (the "present" of Anne's world against which she rebels, to which she finally submits) the real burden of which is its quality of absence. Thus, extreme identification with his heroine represents an attempted appropriation of a past from which he is—by the very fact of a literary ancestor like Hawthorne—all the more displaced. But the very hopelessness of the effort is the extraordinary power of *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet.* This is a poem which celebrates impossibilities. The impossibility of living in the faithless void of the present time, the impossibility of being an American poet at all—these are celebrated in this most American of poems in verse Berryman equalled but never surpassed. And it is the nearly impossible intensity of the poet's emotion—need, rage, longing, grief—that this verse contains, and that his Muse/mistress/subject is able to embody. Anne Bradstreet could, paradoxically, embody for Berryman the very weaknesses and absences from which his poetic effort had hitherto suffered—his breakthrough, at what he described as enormous cost; thereafter, *The Dream Songs* and Henry.

I find this persuasive and poignant, though I am uneasy as to all that celebration of impossibilities. "The impossibility of being an American poet at all"—but we have had Whitman, Dickinson, Frost, Stevens, Marianne Moore, Hart Crane, R. P. Warren, Elizabeth Bishop, John Ashbery, James Merrill, A. R. Ammons and, if you will, Eliot, Pound, W. C. Williams and more. Are we to say of *The Dream Songs* also that the very hopelessness of the effort is their extraordinary power? Poetic ambition is vital to poetic strength, and is commendable, and perhaps (*pace* Allen Tate) the poetic will *can* perform the work of the imagination. Like *Homage, The Dream Songs* would move even the stoniest of critics, but the question cannot be one of pathos alone. Mad songs are a major lyric genre in our language, and Yeats excelled in them, in and for our century. Late Yeats always hovers nearby in *The Dream Songs,* by which I do not mean the Yeatsian *persona* of Crazy Jane and Tom the Lunatic but the mask of Yeats himself, the wild old wicked

man, sometimes appearing as Ribh. What is absent in *The Dream Songs,* inevitably, is the strongest Yeats, the poet who could end almost his last poem by discarding all his own mythologies and personae, and cry aloud in a perfection of agnostic recognition of dying and death:

> O Rocky Voice
> Shall we in that great night rejoice?
> What do we know but that we face
> One another in this place?

Berryman, confronted by that, as all of us are, could only yield, as all of us yield. His own achieved mode, as here in the first stanza of *Dream Song* 88, remained Yeatsian, but without enough perhaps of a swerve into individual difference:

> In slack times visit I the violent dead
> and pick their awful brains. Most seem to feel
> nothing is secret more
> to my disdain I find, when we who fled
> cherish the knowings of both worlds, conceal
> more, beat on the floor,

The violent dead poet here, whose brain is picked, necessarily is Yeats. Berryman, who fled the living world while cherishing the knowings of both the living and the dead, conceals more than Yeats, beats on the floor (a trope taken from Yeats), and finds by rereading Yeats that his own deepest secrets are revealed there, to his own disdain. This has the power of sincerity, but not enough is missing, not enough is misrepresented, and the design is manifestly imposed.

WILLIAM WASSERSTROM

Cagey John: Berryman as Medicine Man

No doubt the situation of the writer in America has always been difficult, his responsibilities always enormous. But they are even more extreme now because everything seems to be turning in on him at once. The mass society in which he lives is becoming even more massive, more monolithic, devious, and even more anxious to swallow him up whole. At the same time, the under-forces he can sense at work are more violent, more destructive, and more impossible to contain or deny. And the certainties have become fewer. . . . Even the dominant creed of modern America, that of psychoanalysis, helps only to thrust the artist more deeply in on himself. So he is left alone to play out by ear his art, his identity, and even his society on the page in front of him.

—A. ALVAREZ

With Theodore Roethke's death, Randall Jarrell's and Delmore Schwartz's, three of the half dozen superbly endowed poets of the American middle generation are now gone. Those who remain, John Berryman, Karl Shapiro, Robert Lowell, survive in the state of touch-and-go. Although it is no longer helpful to speak of this as a condition of the literary life in America, the matter is dramatic enough to warrant mention and to require, someday, sorting out. Survival itself, however, despite disease and gloom, is impressive too. And for all the cachet and power lately come to Lowell and to the Lowell circle at *The New York Review of Books*, it is less Lowell's endurance than

From *The Centennial Review* 12, no. 3 (Summer 1968).

Berryman's which must be celebrated. For it is Berryman's genius that contrives a poetry which blends the twin modes of work and purpose common to all American arts today—measure and balance on the one hand and, on the other, a scarcely controlled explosion of immoderate passion. In William Burroughs's fiction, Norman O. Brown's criticism and Berryman's verse, *77 Dream Songs,* we are confronted by accomplishment of quite a new kind, the attainment of New Apocalyptists, cooked and raw, a ritual ceremony of revelation so fierce and intricate that their work most perplexes those whom it most enchants.

Despite the attention lavished on Berryman's songs, despite a Pulitzer Prize and a unanimity of opinion on the poet's gifts, there are two opposing general views on Berryman's art. Some see artifice where others find innovation, footwork not choreography—as if these poems represented the mind of still another camp follower of apocalypse, a sort of death-of-god man or one of Warhol's Chelsea boys. Those who contend that the poems express a failure, not a feat of language, ascribe this to a defeat of the American artist's will to enact the role of a public poet in a society whose quality and tone must defeat any poet's will. Clotted in the act of utterance, it is said, Berryman does not fuse arcane learning and mother wit, formal speech and demotic. Rather, he resorts to idiosyncrasy and inversion, quirks and tics of diction which exhibit a mind at the end of its tether and do not display means to unlock those fetters which jail the mind.

Negative opinion at its harshest, Philip Toynbee's essay in *Encounter* (March 1965), turns on that critic's effort to "throw a certain doubt on Allen Tate's belief that Berryman's poetry 'cannot be imitated.'" Toynbee offers five samples of Berryman's method, remarks that these are "not consecutive, which does Mr. Berryman an injustice," then confesses that "what may prove to do him a greater injustice is that two of them were written by me, taking a few minutes for each verse." Although in six or twelve lines nearly anyone can seem to imitate almost anybody, the gambit would be more arresting if Toynbee were charier, warier, in its use. For a similar trick opens a later essay, a review of Mary Renault's *The Mask of Apollo* in *The New Republic,* and therefore tends to throw a certain doubt on the utility, for literary criticism, of a reviewer's gimmick.

Toynbee's essay is useful as a point of departure, not for its show of audacity but for its judgment, given in the form of a suspicion, that in the end "there will *not* emerge a sense of that inevitable union of means and meaning which we receive from all good poetry." For what in fact distinguishes Berryman's poetry is the invention of truly audacious means exactly suited to his meaning. Regard the four epigraphs which open the book. The initial

one ("THOU DREWEST NEAR IN THE DAY") stands alone. Unidentified, it is followed, next page, by a trio of lines, the first also unascribed but written in Negro dialect ("GO IN, BRACK MAN, DE DAY'S YO' OWN"); the second (" . . . I AM THEIR MUSICK") is drawn from Lamentations 3:63. And the third ("BUT THERE IS ANOTHER METHOD") is taken from an unnamed work by the South African reformer and fantasist, Olive Schreiner. Short, flat, these seem to offer disjointed, not sibylline learning, and properly mystified, we know that a certain amount of detective work is in order.

What it yields is extraordinary. "GO IN, BRACK MAN" turns up as the epigraph in a book on the history of blackface minstrelsy in America, Carl Wittke's *Tambo and Bones* (1930). Olive Schreiner's comment is taken from a work which has long haunted Berryman, *Dreams* (1914), where Miss Schreiner defined two ways in which artists customarily depict "truth." The first, of which she disapproved, she named the "stage method": people behave as puppets of the creator's will, character is cut and dried, problems are devised so that solutions can be found. "But there is another method—the method of life we all lead. Here nothing can be prophesied. There is a strange coming and going of feet. Men appear, act and re-act upon each other, and pass away. When the crisis comes, the man who would fit it does not return. When the curtain falls, no one is ready. When the footlights are brightest, they are blown out: and what the name of the play is no one knows."

Olive Schreiner was a shrewder theorist than practitioner of literature: her notion of a "stage" method corresponds to the technique Abram Tertz condemns in the essay on socialist realism, and that "other" method corresponds to the technique Tertz approved, the literature of phantasmagoria. Hearing her speak about coming and going of feet, performances of the unnameable, we naturally think of Beckett. But it is not just a prescience of literary cunning which Berryman admires in Miss Schreiner. Both she and that other exemplary lady to whom Berryman has committed himself, Anne Bradstreet, are women in whom a passion for things of the spirit is suffused by a compassion for the life of flesh. Indeed, the color of spirit is in Berryman's view livid flesh. And it is Anne's skin "cratered" by smallpox, the "body a-drain" with its "pustules snapping," which he loves. That identical matters engage Olive Schreiner's sympathy too is evident in a dream-vision, "The Sunlight Lay Across My Bed," where the dreamer finds herself in a place inhabited by people who suffer all the least supportable forms of physical grief. Unaccountably, the more nastily bruised their bodies are, the more intense is the light they exude. "I had thought that blindness and maimedness were great evils," she says, marveling that in this "strange land" men convert pain into energy. Awaking, she realizes that her mission is to celebrate,

without rant or romantic illusion or heroic pose, the vitality of life in men mutilated but unmastered by earth. This was the "music" she would henceforth sing: "I was glad the long day was before me."

Better equipped now to take up the clues offered by Berrman's epigraphs, we recognize in these a filigree of signs which specify a coherent pattern of purposes within the 77 songs. "I AM THEIR MUSICK" links the book, Lamentations, with Olive Schreiner's book, *Dreams*. "BUT THERE IS ANOTHER METHOD," which connotes a particular principle of literary creation, leads to the line from minstrelsy, "GO IN BRACK MAN, DE DAY'S YO' OWN," where dialect alone identifies exactly whose plight and passion and grief and pain are sung by whom on which stage in accord with what mode of performance. Applying a similar technique of argument to the dedicatory epigraph, "THOU DREWEST NEAR IN THE DAY," Lamentations 3:57, we infer that the cycle as a whole, for all its hodgepodge of association, is single-minded in pursuit of one theme: Fear not. "THOU DREWEST NEAR IN THE DAY THAT I CALLED UPON THEE: THOU SAIDST, FEAR NOT."

If all this sounds as much like an exercise in mathematical proof as criticism of verse, part of the reason is that Berryman has in fact introduced a system of arithmetic notation into his numbers and thereby turned the fact of number into a main issue within the very form of the verse. The 77 songs are distributed among three sections—26, 25, 26. With nine exceptions, each poem is 18 lines in length, arranged in three verse paragraphs each six lines long. The nine exceptions must be deliberate, for Berryman resorts to the most patent subterfuges of dilation in order to vary a pattern which could easily conform to standard. And the standard itself is very tidily signified by a cue, at once arithmetic and thematic, present in the central epigraph, Lamentations 3:63—the 77 *Dream Songs* offer three sections of poems, six verses per stanza, three stanzas per poem.

Berryman's taste for mystification is thus supported by a mystique of numerology—a mystique which is the more firmly bolstered by the poet's reliance on a biblical book which is itself gnomic in form and function. Not only does Lamentations mourn the fall of Old Jerusalem and therefore supply a paradigm for Berryman's lament, fall of our New Jerusalem, but also each of its sections develops an alphabetical acrostic. The third section, the one on which Berryman draws, is unique in that it elaborates three verses around its letter instead of the one verse per letter usual in the other sections. That is, Lamentations 3 has 66 verses; the other two sections have 22 verses each. There may be a touch of alphabetic play in the 77 songs, represented by the number of poems placed in each of its segments. But Berryman's ingenuity is spent on an exercise of wider range. For a more impressive intersection

of form and meaning occurs when we restore, from Lamentations 3:63, that half which Berryman has left off: "Behold their sitting down, and their rising up: I am their musick." In this restoration we accomplish nothing less than the connection of minstrel show and holy text. Tambo and Bones rise and sit in response to questions from the Interlocutor who plays straight man to their end men. He is the one through whom the two speak. He is their music and they are of course his. Berryman, casting himself in the role of the interlocutor, in this way devises a secular language and music no less intricate than the sacred. The poet conceives a "method" which will recreate the downs and ups, the debasements which degrade and the passions which inspirit the lives of mutilated men, American Negroes, "Henry" and "Bones," who convert pain into song.

The place of minstrelsy on Berryman's stage cannot, however, be this neatly disposed of. For minstrelsy represents the climactic and synoptic solution to the poet's "long, often back-breaking search for an inclusive style, a style that could use his erudition," Robert Lowell says, and "catch the high, even frenetic, intensity of his experience, disgusts and enthusiasm." Before it is possible to decide whether or not this solution works, it is necessary to acquire a little of Berryman's erudition—that is, search out where diverse clues lead. The second Dream Song, for example, called "Big Buttons, Cornets: the Advance," leads to Daddy Rice, Thomas Dartmouth Rice, a white actor who in the 1820s and 1830s "sang and jumped 'Jim Crow,' " Berryman explains, in dedicating this song to the memory of that man. Impersonating a plantation Negro, dressed in patchy pants and ragged shoes (wearing, according to some reports, a vest with buttons made of five- and ten-dollar gold pieces), he wheeled and turned and jumped "windmill fashion." Throwing weight alternately on the heel of one foot and the toe of the other, he chanted comment on the movements of his dance:

> This is the style of Alabama
> What they hab in Mobile,
> And dis is Louisiana
> Whar de track upon de heel.

From Long Island to Indiana, from "Kentuck" to "ol Mississip," I "weel about, and turn about, and do jis so" and "Eb'ry time I weel about, I jump Jim Crow": Step and fetch it if you can! Because ways of jumping Jim Crow varied from place to place—"De Georgia step" went according to "de double rule of three"—part of the point of Rice's song and dance was to display nuance within the first wholly original and authentic form of folk art to be developed within the American experience. But whatever these steps and rules

were, Rice's impersonations served as the model and mainspring for minstrels and minstrel shows of later decades. Shortly after Rice introduced his dance, in 1828, blackface actors banded together, first in pairs and later in diverse combinations which somehow implicate a rule of three: "two banjoists and one dancer; one banjoist and two dancers; one fiddler and two dancers; one banjoist, a dancer and a singer." Rice himself, dancing solo, remained the most popular of all blackface performers in Great Britain and the United States. He was able to fill the American Theatre on the Bowery even on the "Fifty-seventh night" of this "original and celebrated extravaganza . . . on which occasion every department of the house was thronged to an excess unprecedented in the records of theatrical attraction," according to an advertisement dated November 25, 1833.

Within ten years of this date the Virginia Minstrels had been formed. Four white men in blackface sat onstage in semicircle, turned partly toward the audience and partly toward one another, fiddle and banjo flanked by tambourine and bones. Their show was divided into two parts and both parts alternated ensemble play with solo act—song, skit, dance in no certain order. During the 1850s and later, at a zenith of popularity, the classic form of minstrelsy was fixed by two groups, Bryant's Minstrels and Christy's Band of Original Virginia Minstrels. Christy's three minstrels performed on banjo, violin, tambourine, bones, triangle—and "they all played double." Both this troupe and Bryant's presented a three-part entertainment which opened with a chorus and grand entrance. Then the interlocutor, in whiteface and full dress, said "Gentlemen be seated" and exchanged jokes with Tambo and Bones, dressed in blackface, swallow tails and striped trousers. Part 2, the olio, ended with a hoedown in which each member of the company did a solo turn. What happened in part 3 is not clear—or not clear to me, anyway, for specialists differ in their opinions. It was probably ragout again, spiced by skit, farce and sketch based on subjects drawn from plantation life.

Most of their stuff is lost, but the cakewalk remains alive still, a dance step which, LeRoi Jones contends in *Blues People,* originated as a Negro parody of white high manners in the manor house. Because the cakewalk seems to develop from black caricature of white custom, Jones wonders what response is appropriate to a white company which, unaware of self-mockery, offers Stepin Fetchit as straight burlesque of the black peasantry. "I find the idea of white minstrels in black-face satirizing a dance satirizing themselves a remarkable kind of irony—which, I suppose, is the whole point of minstrel shows." Amplifying this idea, Jones claims that parody in black minstrel shows was directed against whites. Wearing stagy blackface to cover their true color, Negro minstrels in the 1870s exploited the deepest resources of

private and communal life—folk speech, song, dance, game and play—in order to devise a form of public entertainment which would please both sets of audiences. Whereas white minstrels in blackface merely exposed their own folly, Negro minstrels in blackface, anticipating Genet, created a black travestry of white burlesque and thereby cut deep into the double life of both races.

Black minstrels accomplished something really momentous, Jones thinks, by mocking white audiences with a music, true jazz and classic blues, until then unknown outside shantytown. And it is precisely in the use of similar materials that Berryman has introduced matter no less fateful for English prosody. Blues, which spring "from no readily apparent Western source," are customarily pieces in twelve bars: "each verse is of three lines, each line is about four bars long. The words of the song usually occupy about one-half of each line, leaving a space of two bars for either a sung answer or an instrumental response." Knowing that Berryman's epigraphs, for example, which are invariably halved, require the reader to supply that portion of the utterance which the poet has left off, we suspect that the form of blues and not its idiom alone—minstrelsy itself, not just its stereotypes—is subsumed within the very form of Berryman's verse. When the first line of the first Dream Song breaks, the effect is a sort of syncopation ("Huffy Henry hid the day"). But the break elsewhere, as in Song 3, is intended to exact a voiced response from the reader:

> 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,—

There are many examples. But it is in Song 2, the one dedicated to Daddy Rice, which crystallizes the full resourcefulness of Berryman's art. "Le's do a hoedown, gal," in the second stanza, prepares for the olio of the third stanza, where Henry goes into his act, does his solo speciality, enacts a black burlesque of white parody, performs a cakewalk—a masque in which Sir Bones speaks from behind his mask a satiric language taken from Negro rhyming slang, the kind of speech devised in order to hide true meaning from the Man, the enemy:

> —Sir Bones, or Galahad; astonishin
> yo legal & yo good. Is you feel well?