

## Adrienne Rich: On "Negro Minstrelsy" in The Dream Songs

A new language is evolving in the heads of some Americans who use English. Some streak of genius in Berryman told him to try on what he's referred to as "that god-damned baby talk," that blackface dialect, for his persona. No political stance taught him, no rational sympathy with negritude. For blackface is the supreme dialect and posture of this country, going straight to the roots of our madness. A man who needs to discourse on the most extreme, most tragic subjects, has recourse to nigger talk. "Arrive a time when all coons lose dere grip" ? early in the 77; most flamboyant, most broad blackface. Later, more complexly, the muted, the whispering "Come away, Mr. Bones." Come away! Shakespeare's English and some minstrelsy refrain meet, salute and inform each other.

From Adrienne Rich, "Living with Henry," (originally in the *Harvard Advocate* in Spring 1969), rep. in Harry Thomas Ed. *Berryman's Understanding: Reflections on the Poetry of John Berryman* (Boston: Northeastern U P, 1988), 129-130

### Publication Status:

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### Publication:

- Private group -

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John Berryman [2]

### Author:

Adrienne Rich [3]

### Poem:

The Dream Songs [4]

### Tags:

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