

David Ossman: Interview with Amiri Baraka

What [did you learn from] . . . the Black Mountain people, and [William Carlos] Williams?

From Williams, mostly how to write in my own language?how to write the way I *speak* rather than the way I *think* a poem ought to be written?to write just the way it comes to me, in my own speech, utilizing the rhythms of speech rather than any kind of metrical concept. To talk verse. Spoken verse. From Pound, the same concepts that went into the Imagist?s poetry?the idea of the image and what an image ought to be. I learned, probably, about verse from Pound?how a poem should be made, what a poem ought to *look* like?some little inkling. And from Williams, I guess, how to get it out in my own language.

[. . . .]

Does your being a Negro influence the speech patterns?or anything else, for that matter, in your writing?

It could hardly help it. There are certain influences on me, as a Negro person, that certainly wouldn?t apply to a poet like Allen Ginsberg. I couldn?t have written that poem "Kaddish," for instance. And I?m sure he couldn?t write certain things that have to deal with, say, Southern Baptist church rhythms. Everything applies?everything in your life. Sociologically, there are different influences, different things that I?ve seen, that I know, that Allen or no one knows.

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