

# The Works of Henry Dumas—A New Blackness

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## Amiri Baraka

Henry Dumas's Black feeling vessel taken from us by Devils. Our hearts are threatened constantly—by Devils. Sometimes by the Devil in us.

Dumas was a just rising star, so many didn't know him. He was an underground deity, glowing in ascension into post-material recognition. But after the death of his body, his mystical insistence. The spirit glows, speaking in his curious tongue. The ancient Black language. African, African-American, the language is broad to include over 250,000 recorded years of experience on this planet.

Perhaps one million of actual flesh record: the experience of men. Henry Dumas's real name I can only feel. I hear it in his words. The stories like revelations of secret experience. The texts of occult documents that must be read by the leaders of a nation coming into being.

Can you feel the depth of Blackness—color, culture, and consciousness<sup>1</sup>—registered by this work? The language, rhythm, and tension—*songified*, tripping out the characters' mouths. Each sentence a revelation of experience.

The poems are worlds too. Mysterious Black symbol worlds of shimmering utterance. Deep Blackness. The words take you into

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Amiri Baraka applied pith, poignancy, and controversy in his multifaceted role as chief conceptual architect of the 1960s' Neo-Black Arts Movement. His many works, which have been widely translated, include *Preface to a Twenty-Volume Suicide Note*, *Blues People*, *Tales*, and *The Music* (with his wife Amina). He currently commutes from his native Newark, New Jersey, to the State University of New York at Stony Brook, where he chairs the Pan-African Studies department.

This is a slightly emended version of an essay which first appeared as the preface to Henry Dumas's *Poetry for My People* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1970).

feeling; our selves as minds are articulated by them. We speak as actors revealed to ourselves by a sudden will. Rhythm Image. Image opening into Black feeling. And there to redefine & rediscover breathing & seeing. "Sound sense sayings even i intend." The "weirdness" of the work is its pure Black base. It is very seldom euro-literary. It is way cross an ocean of otherness. The alternate to body-brain-sex & money—the peace we seek—the description itself a constant poem of the mind. Uttered here. Spoken. Chanted. Sung. Screamed and, almighty God, it feels good if you can dig it.

My phantom style racing across  
their vision

Sometimes it's not even "a human voice" we are hearing but consciousness manifesting itself. Black persons' consciousness speaking in the world "I am butang / dog."

Once when I was tree  
flesh came and worshipped at my roots.

It is the deep poet who speaks with a voice hardly his own. Words are fleshened sense *feeling* in the all, part of the ether, turned so it exists & you, if you are fortunate, can relate (*Island within Island—wow!!*).

My voice walks like a skeleton

But not only the mystical as mystical but the common revealed uncommonly; i.e., "Natural Men." The hidden fire within all life. And the beautiful poems "Knees of . . .," "My Little Boy . . ." And the lives of Black people, the language is its marrow, the essence even where we cannot follow anymore with simple "talk." Gestures. Shadows. Undifferentiated sound. Animals consciously regarding us. All things animate and knowing. Black men riding dragons or scraping up fish off the Fulton Fish Market floor. A robbery. A rimin' dozens—hymns to Blackness . . .

I might pray  
but dont fuck with me  
cause I dont play

I sense beginnings in Dumas. The beginning (and middle, sometimes so wild & sweet it disappears with your mind—head a vacant circumstance of yearning). Beginnings of another thing. Not N-E-W. But newer than that. So to speak from bones still covered. The vision of eyes sightless for several millennia. Newer than new, so old it seems to be the rebeginning of expression.

I am your paint upon the Zebra and the firebird  
the wild you in the seas climbing up the sun . . .  
O! Ngai, Lord of my skin temple

America (see “America”) in *its* essence does appear as circumstance. The *real* Easy Rider must look up from time to time, look out, & see the eagle on a quarter, dead folks riding herd on live ones. Constant, veiled or direct, spoken of or deeply felt. This brother has a blues line rings elegant formed “American” or Swahili. “Uncle Sam is uptight baby / not a friend in sight.” African in East. African in West (Funky Shango mystery). A balance of all Black across the spectrum—scale of consciousness, & deep feeling. Heavy we say. It’s heavy. It’s deep. A vibrating love mind (the word *feeling*—its sound, its constant movement, constant in mind, of this work).

Dumas’s span shows a feeling (again!) for *all of our selves* or *all of our self*—the large Black majestic one. A truly *new* writer (in the sense that the nationalistic consciousness all of us needs is here, as a *true art form*—not twenty “Hate Whitey’s” & a benediction of sweaty artificial flame, but actual black art, real, man, and stunning).

The fact that he was killed by Devils should continue to pull our coat, brain, hearts to what is happening to us here in the Devil’s land—and also what needs to happen. We can protect ourselves, our real selves, by protecting our artists (the formal expressive artistic part of the race), only by *organizing*. By building large organizations based on nationalism. By building institutions (social, political, creative, religious, historical, economic, ethos-expressing institutions) in which our best minds can research for & reconstruct our black nation. We can grow only when we harness & direct our own energies.

Henry Dumas shot down by the Huge Pig roaming these streets, these subways, looking to devour the royalty of our race. One day in Newark (& all over Black land), we will build a university (universities) in a building shaped like a huge Black fist. And it will have an ankh embedded in the front of it, to signify Peace & Power. Defense & Development. Dumas’s work describes this university in detail, & the energies & feeling which will bring it into being if you can dig it.

**Note**

<sup>1</sup>Three aspects of Blackness cited by Maulana Karenga.