

BERRYMAN, JOHN, 1914-1972

John Berryman collection, 1956-1990

Emory University
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Descriptive Summary

Creator: Berryman, John, 1914-1972
Title: John Berryman collection, 1956-1990
Call Number: Manuscript Collection No. 1225
Extent: .25 linear ft. (1 box)
Abstract: Collection of materials relating to American poet and scholar John Berryman, including correspondence, poems and printed material.
Language: Materials entirely in English.

Administrative Information

Restrictions on Access

Unrestricted access.

Terms Governing Use and Reproduction

All requests subject to limitations noted in departmental policies on reproduction.

Related Materials in Other Repositories

[John Berryman papers](#), University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

Source

Purchase, 2012.

Citation

[after identification of item(s)], John Berryman collection, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

Processing

Processed by Sarah Quigley, 2012.

Collection Description

Biographical Note

John Berryman (1914-1972), American poet and scholar, was born John Allyn Smith, Jr. in McAlester, Oklahoma, to John and Martha Smith. In 1926, John Sr. committed suicide, an event that often recurred as a theme in his son's poetry. Within a few months, Martha Smith married a man named John Berryman. The family moved to New York City and young John took his stepfather's surname. After a suicide attempt in 1931, Berryman entered Columbia University, where he studied English with Mark Van Doren. He graduated in 1936 and completed two years of graduate study at Cambridge University. In 1942, he married Eileen Mulligan, the first of his three wives. They divorced in 1956 and Berryman married Ann Levine, with whom he had one son. Berryman married Kate Donohue in 1961 and the couple had two daughters.

Berryman taught at multiple universities throughout his life, including Wayne State University, Brown University, Princeton University, and Harvard University. In 1955, he was appointed lecturer in humanities at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, where he remained until his death. He published his first major collection of poetry, *The Dispossessed*, in 1948, followed by a biography of writer Stephen Crane in 1950. In 1956, Berryman published *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet*, which was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. Berryman is perhaps best known for *The Dream Songs*, a collection of 385 sonnet-like poems told from the perspective of Berryman's alter-ego, Henry. In 1964, the first installment, *77 Dream Songs*, won the Pulitzer Prize. Berryman published the second installment, *His Toy, His Dream, His Rest*, in 1968. The two volumes were republished as *The Dream Songs* in 1969.

Berryman struggled with alcoholism and depression throughout his life and was hospitalized multiple times. He committed suicide in 1972 by throwing himself off of the Washington Avenue Bridge in Minneapolis.

Scope and Content Note

The collection consists of materials relating to American poet and scholar John Berryman from 1956-1990, including correspondence, poetry and printed material. Correspondence consists primarily of letters written by Berryman to his close friend and colleague Ralph G. Ross, chair of the Humanities Department at the University of Minnesota. In the letters, Berryman describes writing the poems that would become *77 Dream Songs*, as well as his struggles with his health and alcoholism.

Poetry consists of typescript drafts of poems relating to Berryman's *The Dream Songs*, as well as uncollected poems. Many of the poems are signed by Berryman and/or inscribed to Ross. Of particular note are the 20 dream songs drafted for Ross's birthday, which include a number of poems that were considered for *77 Dream Songs* but not included in the volume. Untitled poems are identified by their first lines and dream songs have been labeled where possible. Printed material in the collection primarily post-dates Berryman's death and includes clippings about the poet, as well as fliers and programs from University of Minnesota events relating to Berryman's life and work.

Arrangement Note

Arranged in alphabetical order by record type.

Container List

Correspondence and personal papers

Box	Folder	Content
1	1	Correspondence, no date
1	2	Correspondence, 1956-1971
1	3	Last will and testament, 1962

Poetry

1	4	[20 Dream Songs], "20 of them drafted to Ralph as a birthday gift," 1958 [includes 20 poems considered for 77 Dream Songs, some of which were never published]
1	5	"Calamity," [Dream Song 244], signed typescript, 1956
1	6	"Certainty Before Lunch," typescript [photocopy], no date
1	7	"Dry Eleven Months," typescript, 1971
1	8	"Eve," typescript [photocopy], no date
1	9	"Henry's Farewell--I," [Dream Song 276], typescript, no date
1	10	"Henry's Farewell--II," [Dream Song 277], typescript, no date
1	11	"Henry's Farewell--III," [Dream Song 278], signed typescript, no date
1	12	"How Do You Do, Dr. Berryman, Sir?" signed typescript [photocopy], 1971
1	13	"I.R., ob. 1956," signed typescript, no date
1	14	"King David Dances," signed typescript [photocopy], 1971
1	15	"Matins," typescript [photocopy], no date
1	16	"Not to Live/Jamestown 1957," signed typescript, 1957
1	17	"Old Man Goes South Again Alone," signed typescript [photocopy], 1971
1	18	"Opus Dei: Lauds," typescript, no date
1	19	"A Prayer After All," signed typescript [photocopy], 1970
1	20	"The Prayer of the Middle Aged Man," typescript [photocopy], no date
1	21	"A Strut for Roethke," [Dream Song 18], typescript, no date
1	22	"A Sympathy, A Welcome," signed typescript, 1957
1	23	"Tampa Stomp," typescript [photocopy], no date
1	24	"To Robert Lowell," signed typescript, 1962
1	25	"Two Dream Songs," signed manuscript, 1959
1	26	Untitled, "An undead morning. I..shuffle my poss's." [Dream Song 243], signed typescript, no date
1	27	Untitled, "Failed as a maker, nailed as scholar, failed," [Dream Song 184], signed typescript, 1964
1	28	Untitled, "Henry in trouble whirped out lonely whines," [Dream Song 114], signed typescript, 1963

- 1 29 Untitled, "I am the little man who smokes & smokes," [Dream Song 22], signed typescript, 1958
- 1 30 Untitled, "Man? Bewildered, Henry stared at the world opposite," signed typescript, 1963
- 1 31 Untitled, "Seedy Henry rose up shy in de world," [Dream Song 77], typescript, no date
- 1 32 Untitled, "Some remember (pretty well) the Korean War," [Dream Song 217], typescript, no date

Printed material

- 1 33 Christmas card, "Two Dream Songs," 1965
- 1 34 Clippings about Berryman, circa 1972-1987 [includes obituaries]
- 1 35 Flier, "New Directions in the Arts," spring lecture series, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, circa 1974
- 1 36 Funeral program, 1972
- 1 37 Program, "John Berryman: His Life, His Work, His Thought," University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, October 25-27, 1990
- 1 38 Resolution in honor of Berryman, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1972
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