



ANOTHER MAN DONE GONE: SELF-PITY IN BALDWIN'S ANOTHER COUNTRY

By BOYD M. BERRY

WHEN we consider the work of Negro writers—Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, William Kelley, or James Baldwin, for instance—all of us, I think, white or black, are inclined to expect to hear more about man's inhumanity to the Negro, than about man's inhumanity to Man. We want such artists to write about unmistakably negroid Negroes—never mind about the white stuff, that's already been done. Such an approach, I am quite sure, is wrong; it rests, essentially, upon the assumption that Negroes are different from people. As a result of this error, our discussions of Negro novelists tend to confuse elements of a civil rights rally with an analysis of artistic productions. More important, such an error dulls our critical eyesight, for having committed it, we can no longer judge whether the artist himself portrays Negroes as different in any way from the rest of humanity. In order to correct that error, we must form our opinion of Negro characters in fiction as men first, and as Negroes secondarily,

and we must therefore begin by disregarding, as far as we are able, whether the novelist is himself a Negro or not.¹

One novel—*Another Country*—by one Negro novelist—James Baldwin—will illustrate my point. Keeping firmly in mind that, although Baldwin is a Negro, it does not follow that he automatically shares the views of his Negro characters, we can, first, examine Baldwin's treatment of Negroes in that one novel, and, second, on the basis of it, tentatively appraise Baldwin's perception of all men.

Baldwin has himself recognized, to varying degrees, the danger inherent in reading novels by Negroes as part of a special class, almost outside the history of the novel. Such an insight is, it seems, at the heart of his famous criticism of Wright's *Native Son* in his essay "Many Thousands Gone."² Bigger Thomas in *Native Son*, he points out, is objectively subhuman, and any attempt by either Wright or his audience to see him, at the conclusion of his story, as in any way

MR. BERRY (A.B., '61, Harvard; A.M., '62, Michigan) a Teaching Fellow in English (1963-64) and University Fellow (1964-65) is pursuing his Ph.D., a study of Milton and English Calvinism. He taught English in Nigeria during the first half of 1966, while his wife, Sara, a graduate student in the University's Economics Department, gathered material for her dissertation.

¹In a lecture at the University of Michigan in December, 1964, and in subsequent correspondence, Professor Nathan A. Scott, Jr., The Divinity School, The University of Chicago, has helped considerably to clarify some parts of my thinking in this essay.

²In *Notes of a Native Son* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), pp. 24-25.