

THE POETRY OF JOHN BERRYMAN:  
THE LIFE OF HIS ART

Charles W. Thornbury

A dissertation submitted to  
the University of Leicester  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

July 1976

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ABSTRACT

"John Berryman's poetry: The Life of His Art"  
Ph.D., 1976 by Charles W. Thornbury



Each of three parts examines the complex rhythmic and dramatic means by which Berryman's poetry became a single drive towards life and a sense of wholeness. Part I explains Berryman's notion of "living poetry," using the concept of rhythm, not simply metrics, and analyzes four exemplary poems which span the thirty-five years of his career. Part II places Berryman in the English Romantic tradition of the poetry of experience with special reference to Keats's notion of the "chameleon poet" and Wordsworth's and Yeats's poetry of the central self. Much of the argument of Part II is based on Berryman's unpublished notes on Keats's Letters.

Part III examines in detail, in light of the first two parts, the three major phases of Berryman's poetry and focuses primarily on The Dispossessed (1948), The Dream Songs (1967), and Love & Fame (1971) each of which are representative of each phase. In the first phase, Berryman carefully polishes his verse, and he takes as his models Yeats and Auden. But during his long apprenticeship (ca. 1935-45), he begins to find his own voice through his strong sense of being a chameleon poet (i.e. dramatic monologue) and by concentrating mainly upon characters who are under stress -- thus, the beginning of his disrupted syntax which continues in his Sonnets, written in 1947, and in Homage to Mistress Bradstreet. But not until The Dream Songs does Berryman's twisted syntax seem functional. The Dream Songs is Berryman's greatest work not only artistically, but also in the penetration of its thought, the subtlety of its feeling, and the sense of wholeness it suggests. In the third phase (Love & Fame) Berryman sets out to do something he had not done before. His style becomes simple, but explosive, and his voice speaks directly and autobiographically. But his poetry is still no less subtle and complex in his exploration of the nature of his relation to past and future experience.

## PREFACE

I wish to thank Mr. G.S. Fraser for undertaking the supervision of my research and for his careful reading of the dissertation while it was still in rough draft. I am indebted to him for his innumerable suggestions, and I am grateful for his personal kindness to me. To Mr. Martin Dodsworth of the University of London, I am indebted for acting as my external examiner.

This dissertation has its genesis in my M.A. thesis (University of Leicester 1973) on Berryman's The Dream Songs. I have drawn generally from several of the ideas I worked out then; in my chapter here on The Dream Songs, I have substantially rethought, revised, rewritten, and expanded my previous work.

I have a very keen sense of my work on Berryman's poetry as having been a community effort; I owe much to the energetic intelligence of so many who were willing to discuss various topics at length. I especially wish to thank Mr. Philip Dodd, Mr. Lyman Andrews, Dr. Steve Reno, Dr. Christopher Pollnitz, Dr. Paris Leary, Professor A.R. Humphreys, and Professor J.S. Cunningham. To the library staff of the University of Leicester, I am obliged for the attention they have shown me.

Others have been extremely kind and generous: Mrs. Kate Berryman has replied to my queries and allowed me to transcribe John Berryman's unpublished notes on Keats's Letters; Audrey Craig has taken extra time and care in typing the final copy of the dissertation; and my brother Herbert, without whose aid I could not have completed my work. And finally I reserve my deepest gratitude to my wife Kathy -- for her typing, for her scholarly help, for her patience, for so much else.

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## INTRODUCTION

Leaving the ends aft open, touch the means  
whereby we ripen. Touch by all means the means  
whereby we come to life....

The Dream Songs VII, 305

The basis of my approach to John Berryman's poetry may be best summarized in Matthew Arnold's general statement about Wordsworth's poetry: "... let our minds rest upon that great and inexhaustible word life, until we learn to enter into its meaning."<sup>1</sup> Any serious poet would hope that when we read, hear, understand, feel, and participate in, his works, the energy and inexhaustible meaning of a life, or of lives, is infused in and animated by at least some of his lines. My study of Berryman's poetry has its genesis in the belief that his poetry gives us that sense of life, of "Life immense in passion, pulse, and power..." as Whitman said of his own Songs.

To Matthew Arnold the meaning of art in life was that "poetry is a criticism of life," a moral judgement on the part of the poet and reader. This approach to the complex relations between life and art is a critical snare I hope to avoid. My emphasis, while not ignoring morality, will focus upon how poetry comes to life, how poetry may be one way whereby we come to life, how poetry enacts its human and humane function.

Arnold, as T.S. Eliot has observed, "was so conscious of what, for him, poetry was for, that he could not altogether see what it is,"<sup>2</sup> and as a result, his "notion of 'life,' in his account of poetry, does not perhaps go deep enough."<sup>3</sup> But how does the critic talk about this

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1. Matthew Arnold, "Wordsworth," Essays in Criticism: First and Second Series (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1964), p.302.
  2. T.S. Eliot, "Matthew Arnold" The Uses of Poetry and the Uses of Criticism (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1964), p.118.
  3. Ibid., p.119.

deepness? A general statement like Arnold's or like A.C. Bradley's ("There is plenty of connection between life and poetry, but it is, so to say, a connection underground."<sup>1</sup>) might lead, at one extreme, to a sort of mystical reverence, and, at the other, to seeing poems as purely verbal structures. The task of the critic, it seems to me, is to strike a sensitive balance, something like Eliot's idea (his reply to Arnold) of the "auditory imagination," that is,

the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word; sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back, seeking the beginning and the end. It [the "auditory imagination"] works through meanings, certainly, or not without meanings in the ordinary sense, and fuses the old and obliterated and the trite, the current, and the new and surprising, the most ancient and the most civilized mentality. 2

Something like this "interpenetration of life and art" as Berryman says of Pound's best Cantos, a "Coleridgean fusing," animates the best of Berryman's poetry.

Part of the critic's work, when he attempts to write about a large body of poetry, is to differentiate the parts or stages of the whole, to isolate and analyze the elements of those stages, and, finally, to make a synthesis of the whole. But terms like "stages," "structures," and "synthesis" betray, too often, the schematic approach, an approach which divests the poetry of its life, (assuming that "life" is the intent of the poetry) and suppresses its truest meaning. That Berryman's poetry was intended to "come to life" is clear from his earliest poetry. In one of his student poems he, or his persona, says "To an Artist Beginning Her Work":

Create the bones, the skin  
And when the flesh is packed  
Carefully there, the soul  
Will appear and control. 3

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1. A.C. Bradley, Oxford Lectures on Poetry (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1965), p.6.
  2. Eliot, "Matthew Arnold," pp.118-19.
  3. John Berryman, "To an Artist Beginning Her Work," Columbia Poetry (1936), p.11.

Later in Berryman's career, Henry goes deeper and suggests a less mystical and Yeatsian sense of penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling:

Notes in the sullen ground  
are not passed, or found  
Their solitude is great & dug to last,  
their final memory a scary boat.

(The Dream Songs, VI, 268)

So I shall assume that the life is both in details a part of and in the total oeuvre the whole of Berryman's poetry. But how his poetry animates life will be my major concern. Very recently, in fact after I had completed my study, Denis Donoghue assessed Berryman's poetry as "eventful in terms of diction, syntax, and above all rhythm, because rhythm is the most intimate sign of the poet's presence."<sup>1</sup> The "rhythm" of Berryman's poetry has been one of my major avenues of approach; it is Berryman's "rhythm," of a line, a stanza, a whole poem, a series of poem; rhythm not only gives us an "intimate sign of the poet's presence" but also breathes life into the poem so that the poet, the poem, and the reader interpenetrate with a real sense which could also be described as a living relation. In Part I, I explore this relationship between poet, poem, and reader. My discussion of rhythm is not simply the sound of metrics; I see rhythm as a fuller resonance of the complex rhythms, which originate in sense experience, of image, symbol, theme, feeling, thought, and identity. My intention is to lay the groundwork for Berryman's poetry of experience, and I offer four poems, which span a thirty-five year period, as examples of the shifting fields of energy in the whole of Berryman's poetry and as evidence that my theory of complex rhythm flows out of, rather than is imposed upon, his poetry. I do not see his career as a poet in tidy and separate stages, but as fields of energy flowing one into the other.

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1. Denis Donoghue, ed. "Introduction," Seven Modern American Poets: from MacLeish to Nemorov, An Introduction (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1975), pp.9-10.

Robert Lowell has observed that each of Berryman's successive works made up "a single drive against the barriers of the commonplace."<sup>1</sup> Lowell is suggesting, in other words, that the common life of the individual is the essential subject of Berryman's poetry. The grand hero did not interest Berryman in his poetry; he believed firmly in Goethe's observation that "the apprehension and representation of the individual is the very life of art."<sup>2</sup> Berryman's search for how to reveal, not simply tell about, the individual personality probably has many sources, but I believe that Keats's notion, in his Letters, of the "chameleon poet" was a major part of Berryman's thinking. My concern in Part II is to explore in depth the notion of the "chameleon poet." Basically, the chameleon poet is always, in Keats's phrase, "in for and filling some other body." But in Berryman's practice of this dramatic principle, we are always aware that the poet is still present and himself; the most his chameleon nature will allow him is to sharpen his (and our) awareness and sympathy, so that the notion for Berryman is not only a method but serves a humane function.

With these two notions, complex rhythm and dramatization, of Berryman's poetics in mind, I turn to representative volumes in Part III of the three major phases of Berryman's poetry: The Dispossessed (1948), The Dream Songs (1967), and Love & Fame (1971). I see these volumes as the height of Berryman's achievement during that particular phase; Berryman's Sonnets, Homage to Mistress Bradstreet, and Delusions, Etc. all have their special merits and qualities, but I see each as either connecting or belonging to Berryman's three phases. Changes of style and tone would seem to suggest separate stages of Berryman's poetry: in The Dispossessed many of his early poems have a somber, heavy, Yeatsian style; in The Dream Songs the style is "crumpled" (as he said in his Sonnets) and

1. Robert Lowell, "The Poetry of John Berryman" The New York Review of Books, II (May 28, 1964), 3.
2. John Peter Eckermann, Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret, trans. John Oxenford (London: George Bell & Sons, 1875), p.30.

disrupted, but in the end mended into a rich texture of experience; and finally, in Love & Fame the style is simple and fairly straightforward. But these changes of style do not automatically divide Berryman's work into separate unrelated blocks, for throughout his poetry complex rhythms and dramatization bring the three phases into a common field. His complex art, like life, does not yield itself up for the asking; one is not simply given the interpenetration of poet, poem, and reader, of thought, feeling, and experience, which intone the deep soundings of his music.

PART I. TOWARDS BERRYMAN'S POETRY

"When... you are asked whether the value of a poem lies in a substance got by decomposing the poem, and present, as such, only in reflective analysis, or whether the value lies in a form arrived at and existing in the same way, you will answer, 'It lies neither in one, nor in the other nor in any addition of them, but in the poem, where they are not'."

A.C. Bradley, "Poetry for Poetry's Sake"

A poem or story is constructed in the mind of its author and transmitted more or less directly, by means of print (less often, the spoken voice), to the mind of the reader. We can only say "more or less" directly, because the transmission is never complete: no reader ever understands any poem or story completely -- the reason for this being that it is quite impossible to set arbitrary bounds to the area of suggestiveness of any good poem or story.

John Berryman, The Arts of Reading

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In an animated exchange between A. Alvarez and John Berryman, Berryman grandly declared that at least thirty people read his poetry. He asked Alvarez if he had as many readers: "I haven't got three readers," Alvarez replied. Then Berryman, chuckling,

"Well then, I've been boasting. Thirty is too many -- that's a lot. Maybe I have eight. Does that make you feel better?"

Alvarez, relieved,

"That makes me feel much, much more cheerful."

Finally, Berryman with a flourish,

"O.K. eight. Ah, but those people are awful bright."<sup>1</sup>

Some would say that Berryman's select audience is not worth boasting about; others might argue that great poets take a while to understand. But whatever one's view, we still must contend with the difficulty Berryman's poetry presents -- his voice, syntax, allusions,

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1. "A Memorial Tribute to John Berryman," BBC Radio 3, April 21, 1972.

and concerns put off many readers. Berryman's mind, as he said of T.S. Eliot's, "is grievous and profound beyond a single poet's"; and as for readers and critics, they "will have to follow, wherever, wherever."<sup>1</sup> In fact, over twenty years after that statement, Berryman compared his own career with that of Eliot's:

What he would do -- he would collect himself and write a masterpiece, then relax for several years writing prose, earning a living, and so forth; then he'd collect himself and write another masterpiece, very different from the first, and so on. He did this about five times, and after the Four Quartets he lived on for twenty years. He wrote absolutely nothing. It's a very strange career. Very -- a pure system of spasms. My career is like that. It is horribly like that. 2

Whether Berryman wrote masterpieces or whether he wrote "nothing" (obviously Berryman did not think much of Eliot's plays) in the last years of his life will be part of the undertaking of this thesis, but however his poetry is to be judged, his career was indeed "a pure system of spasms."

How does one come to terms with and accurately appraise such an erratic career? Obviously to rivet to one critical approach would not do justice to Berryman's poetry. In this part, my own approach of rhythm and the concept of rhythm, though at first might seem abstract, will, I believe, give scope enough to allow a broad overview of his poetry, but not be so broad as to ignore details or to be confusing or meaningless. To see Berryman's poetry as "a pure system of spasms" is perhaps the way to begin, for it seems to me that the whole of Berryman's poetry, as well as single long and short poems, must be seen as rhythmic, flowing, and dynamic. To insist upon vitality is to remember the great energy which was fundamental to Berryman's reading of his own poems; it is to remember his remarkable empathy and emotional identification

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1. John Berryman, "A Peine ma Piste," Partisan Review, XV (March 1948), 828.
  2. Peter Stitt, "The Art of Poetry XVI: John Berryman 1914-72," The Paris Review, XIV (Winter 1972), 185.

with the subjects of his poetry; it is to recall his supreme awareness of the nature, the means, and the ends of poetry; and finally, it is to acknowledge that a critical dogmatism will not do. The process of making a poem, what manner to adopt, what subjects matter most, and the process of the reader/hearer experiencing a poem were often subjects of both his criticism and poetry. When Berryman was asked why he became a poet, he replied, "I had and have to [write poetry]. It's what I do, the way beavers build dams and presidents make decisions."<sup>1</sup> His reply reveals an urgent need, a trust in instinct and intuition, and points to a social responsibility. To him poetry was and is a self-constructing, self-asserting, self-assuring, and self-protecting activity. Elsewhere, Berryman reflects upon the motives for making poetry:

The motives for making poetry have regularly been complex and beyond analysis: love of the stuff and of rhythm, the need to invent, a passion for getting things right, the wish to leave one's language in better shape than one found it, a jealousy for the national honor, love for a person or for God, attachment to human possibility, pity, outletting agony or disappointment, exasperation, malice, hatred. Desire for fame and the entertaining of an audience are only two other motives.... 2

This, then, is where we should begin: Berryman's poetry, as with any major poetry, is a great churning reservoir of vitality, feeling, and intellect.

#### 1. Rhythm: The Ebb and Flow of Poetry and Criticism

In a metrical scansion, the uniqueness and vitality of the poetry are transcribed as a hieroglyph; formulae and patterns externalize the movement of the flowing process of thought and feeling which the poem should set in motion. Externalization in fact is the reason for our drastically different responses to poetry and criticism: criticism is

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1. Jane Howard, "Whisky and Ink, Whisky and Ink," Life LXIII (July 1967), 74.
  2. John Berryman, "The Revolving Bookstand," The American Scholar, 28 (Summer 1959), 386.

too often of the mind alone, while poetry is of the mind and heart. As A.E. Housman rightly says in The Name and Nature of Poetry, "meaning is of the intellect, poetry is not [of the intellect alone]." <sup>1</sup> The reader may happily say of some critical work that it has given him a "fresh insight" into a poem or into several poems, and thus he dissolves the hieroglyph back into the experience of living with and in a poem. Then again, the reader may not dissolve the pattern; he may hold fast to the stasis he has been given. He becomes as a person who will not be hypnotized because he is too preoccupied with the mechanics of the method. Formulae and patterns make sense; they stay in place and give confidence to that reader who is not assured of the life, power, and profundity of imaginative fulfilment. Such a reader has confidence in the facts of today's newspaper, is inspired by the figures of yesterday's stock market, and believes absolutely in the power of the latest nuclear dynamo. But it is no good scolding readers alone; criticism must shoulder some of the blame. What we require is a vitality in criticism; what we require is a criticism that not only expands the reader's intellectual awareness but also pumps blood into the experience of poetry.

Not very long ago John Bayley made a plea for more vitality in criticism; he said that literary criticism does a disservice to poetry if it ignores the "ghost" in the poem. Naturally, in our criticism we write empirically because we believe that felt response is too subjective; the result is that we forget that ghosts do not observe empirical walls. Bayley, who improvises upon Descartes' analogy, suggests that "a poem is both a ghost and a machine, and though a machine can be dismantled and demonstrated without reverence, a ghost is still entitled to be treated with something of the old romantic awe." <sup>2</sup> Bayley admirably

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1. A.E. Housman, The Name and Nature of Poetry, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1933), p.38.
  2. John Bayley, The Romantic Survival (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p.73.

attempts to inject a sense of wonder into the clotted veins of criticism, but instead of facing the problem squarely, he sidesteps the issue of the criticism itself and stresses the importance of the critic's response to a poem; in short, the critic must undertake nothing less than a "whole-hearted submission to the poetic experience"<sup>1</sup> before he begins to write critically about poetry. If the critic whole-heartedly submits himself to the poetic experience, then, Bayley implies, criticism should take care of itself, fewer nuts and bolts and more glowing evanescence. While Bayley's emphasis on the critic might very well foster some new energy in criticism, it does not necessarily follow that the spirit of a critic's response will spill over into his criticism; indeed "awe" in criticism would likely produce a slap-happy, sugar-coated criticism. Why emphasize before we begin to analyze a poem? Why not emphasize this vitality as we analyze a poem? Why not infuse this premise of whole-heartedness into the critical approach? I believe that the concept of rhythm may replenish and sustain one way to both discuss a poem analytically and at the same time generate some of the energy and whole-heartedness that poetry deserves.

I am proposing a literary concept of rhythm, for I wish to suggest something more than the limitation of the secondary meaning of rhythm as meter (that is, the beat, modulation, and flow of sound and pause). In one sense "rhythm" and the "concept of rhythm" are the same thing, but "concept" suggests that I am taking a more distant, abstract, and general view of rhythm. I intend to distinguish between a mechanical and discernible rhythm and a complex, multifarious concept of rhythm which hovers at the margin of formulation. Our word "rhythm" derives from the Greek word rhythmos which means regularly recurring, though not necessarily strictly recurring, motion or time. In turn, regularly recurring motion or time suggests proportion or symmetry of

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1. Ibid., p.72.

parts, hence the form and shape of a thing. Generally speaking, rhythmos means a dynamic (but may also suggest a static) proportion, arrangement, and order of the state or condition of anything. Rhythmos does not denote a self-ordering tendency, which I shall argue as I develop the concept of rhythm, but rather, a made ordering as the verb rhythmo denotes (to bring into measure or proportion). In our usage of the word "rhythm" we have preserved most of the original meaning of rhythmos; as I refer to "rhythm", I shall depend particularly upon its meaning a dynamic way of looking at a person, people, objects, sound, and meaning in time, all of which are marked by a regular recurrence and natural flow of related elements. To begin a discussion of the concept of rhythm, we must recognize those elements which generate a flow and bring a poem to life: the poet, the poem, and the reader (or hearer). These three elements may be seen as a fused nucleus of energy, or a whole cell (all three elements are necessary to make the complete cell), and this cell exists in the environment of the past, present, and future of the outside world. As with any living cell, there is a flux of energy flowing from the membrane of the organism (poet-poem-reader) to the outside world as well as energy flowing from the outside world to the organism.<sup>1</sup>

Given that thought is the basis of most literary criticism, we should first recall that thought arranges itself within living experience. To forget that reason flows out of an energy of the senses would be to lop off that important dimension of reason. Each memory and response varies; our separate abilities to interpret slide into different levels of penetration and perception, but we all read and think, critically or casually, in a constant of self-ordering rhythm. We read, as Keats

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1. I am taking my cue from M.H. Abrams for these co-ordinates. My concept of these co-ordinates differs from that of Abrams in that I see them less as a "convenient pattern" and more as an organic whole. See "Some Co-ordinates of Art Criticism" in The Mirror and the Lamp (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp.6-7.

says in his letters, in a "voyage of conception,"<sup>1</sup> and once we set out upon such a voyage, nothing hinders the continuous rebirth of the mind's energy:

I had an idea that a Man might pass a very pleasant life in this manner -- let him on a certain day read a certain Page of Full Poesy or distilled Prose, and let him wander with it, and muse upon it, and reflect upon it, and bring home to it, and prophesy upon it and dream upon it, until it becomes stale -- but when will it do so? Never. When Man has arrived at a certain ripeness in intellect any one grand and spiritual passage serves him as a starting-post towards all "the two-and-thirty Palaces". How happy is such a voyage of conception, what delicious diligent Indolence! A doze upon a sofa does not hinder it and a nap upon Clover engenders ethereal fingerpointings -- the prattle of a child gives it wings, and the converse of middle age a strength to beat them -- a strain of music conducts to "an odd angle of the Isle," and when the leaves whisper it puts a girdle round the earth. 2

Keats does not simply suggest that the mind oscillates in spasms of energy, he is saying that, in the energy of learning, thought eventually and naturally "girdle[s] round" into a wholeness. He goes on to compare this energy of mind with a spider which spins out a web, touching points of leaves and twigs until it "fills the air with a beautiful circuiting."<sup>3</sup> Or take for example several modern poets' views of the mind's tendency to order itself. Yeats said that "the borders of our mind are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and reveal a single mind, a single energy."<sup>4</sup> Eliot said that "the poet's mind is a receptacle for seizing and storing of numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together."<sup>5</sup> D.W. Harding, a contemporary critic, is aware of, and

1. Maurice Buxton Forman, ed. The Letters of John Keats, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), p.103.
2. Ibid., pp.102-103.
3. Ibid.
4. W.B. Yeats, "Magic," Essays and Introductions (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1961), p.28.
5. T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Selected Essays (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1951), p.286.

in his criticism makes use of, the psychology of the mind; he expresses the self-ordering nature of the mind as it encounters other minds in "The Hinterland of Thought":

We stand at the harbour of our mind and watch flotillas of ideas far out at sea coming up over the horizon, already in formation of a sort; and though we can re-order them to a great extent, we cannot disregard the organization they had before they came into sight. 1

Because of the mind's self-ordering nature, Harding considers the creative work an imaginative self-ordering,

... in creative work great numbers of ideas, more or less organized, are simply out of sight beyond the horizon and can be brought into view only through the redispersions we make amongst the in-shore mental shipping that we can see and control. 2

The exception to this vital self-ordering process of the mind is when we rely too much upon pre-established conclusions, and we impose, like Wallace Stevens' Canon Aspirin who "imposes orders as he thinks of them."<sup>3</sup> In the concept of rhythm we are setting out to discover:

... to impose is not  
To discover. To discover an order as of  
A season, to discover summer and know it,

To discover winter and know it well, to find, 4  
Not to impose, not to be reasoned at all....

In William Blake's simple-complex view of the universe he says that "Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy."<sup>5</sup> If it is not taking too much of a liberty with Blake's notion, in the light of seeing energy as self-ordering, it is also true to say that "Energy is the source that pushes towards the bound or outward circumference which is Reason." We may compare this relation of energy to reason to the splash

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1. D.W. Harding, Experience into Words (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1963), p.193.
  2. Ibid.
  3. Wallace Stevens, Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1955), p.403.
  4. Ibid., pp.403-4.
  5. William Blake, Blake: Complete Writings, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p.149.

of a rock in a pool; the splash of energy impels the ripples outward so that the outermost circles, which we may call reason, are not merely circumscriptions, but are dependent upon the rippling circles which precede them.

So it is with the poet who drops his poem into the mind of a reader; what is true of the mind's rippling flow of circles is no less true of a reader's response to a poem as he returns to the poem again and again. (We never really know a poem until it dissolves into our experience over a period of time.) This self-ordering rhythm is also true of the act of creating a poem, the poet's rhythm of creation, rhythm becoming meaning. (I have assumed all along that the rhythm of words and the meaning of words must coalesce: "how impossible it is," I.A. Richards says, "to consider rhythm or metre as though it were purely an affair of the sensory aspect of syllables and could be dissociated from their sense and from the emotional effects which come about through their sense."<sup>1</sup>) A.C. Partridge defines the rhythm of sound as "the interplay of sounds of varying magnitude with silences (or pauses)... and... is nominally measured in time."<sup>2</sup> But the rhythm of words, being neither pure sound nor pure form, must coalesce, Partridge recognizes, with the structure and syntax of those words and, most importantly, with the denotative, connotative, and emotional meanings of the words.

In English and American poetry at the beginning of the twentieth century, a new interest in vers libre forced a rethinking of rhythm as it relates to meaning. What came from this new interest was a new strength in poetry, the "principal strength" Partridge goes so far as to assert, of a coalescence of rhythm and meaning. But this did not

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1. I.A. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1926), p.109.
  2. A.C. Partridge, The Language of Modern Poetry: Yeats, Eliot, Auden, (London: Andre Deutsch, 1976), p.58.

happen overnight; their reconsideration of rhythm and meaning forced both English and American poets to rethink slowly (and in some cases to retrench their views rapidly) the relation between rhythm and meaning. Out of this plethora of arguments and experiments came the realization that in creating a poem, its rhythm "evolves naturally in the process of gestation."<sup>1</sup> It might seem odd that most of the poets who rethought the relation between rhythm and meaning concluded that rhythm, in many cases, came before meaning, but there are sufficient examples to support the notion. Ezra Pound tells us that Yeats, before he would write a lyric, was "apt to 'get a chune  $\sqrt{\text{Neo-Celtic for tune}}$  in his head'."<sup>2</sup> Eliot, too, felt that a poem shapes itself out of a rhythm rather than a form; form, words, ideas, and images, he said, flow out of a rhythm:

I know that a poem, or a passage of a poem, may tend to realize itself first as a particular rhythm before it reaches expression in words, and that this rhythm may bring to birth the idea and the image. 3

Or to take an example outside the modern mainstream, Goethe, in his "conversations" with Eckermann, concluded that the most which may be said of "rhythm in general" is that "no certain rules can be laid down for such matters." Goethe went on to say that rhythm or meter (measure) evolves in a natural process which helps bring the words into being:

The measure... flows, as if it were, unconsciously from the mood of the poet. If he thought about it while writing the poem he would go mad, and produce nothing of value. 4

Examples of rhythm as the moving force which brings words into a certain order of expression may be found in more recent statements as well.

Stephen Spender in The Making of a Poem says, "when I am writing, the music of the words I am trying to shape takes me beyond the words, I am

1. Ibid., p.70.

2. Ezra Pound, ABC of Reading (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1951), p.202.

3. T.S. Eliot, "The Music of Poetry," On Poetry and Poets (New York: The Noonday Press, 1961), p.32.

4. Eckermann, Conversations of Goethe, p.389.

aware of a rhythm, a dance, a fury, which is yet empty of words."<sup>1</sup>

There are most certainly individual and universal physiological and psychological reasons for the dominance of rhythm in creating a poem.<sup>2</sup> We delight in rhythm; we like the expectancy and order that rhythm creates; we are "lulled" by rhythm, as Yeats said, for rhythm prolongs "the moment of contemplation."<sup>3</sup> We might say generally that our universal sense of rhythm flows naturally out of the energy and motion of living. But this sense of universal rhythm, when related to creating or responding to a poem, must be viewed in individual terms as well, and the individual experience of either creating or responding to a poem inevitably modulates into or reacts against the rhythms of the surrounding world. The poet's poetry may praise and participate in the rhythm of the seasons; he may feel the rhythm, the to and fro relation with his society or with other societies; he may see his relation to other individuals and a thousand and one things outside himself. Christopher Middleton, an English poet now living in America, described rhythm as the binding force between the individual and the outside world; he sees rhythm as "a kind of psychic tightrope,"

along which the human mind dances when man answers the profound need to identify with not-self, to go forth and meet "the other"; in ritual chant, in the movements of Bushman hunters, or in the Chinese Tai-Chi exercises, which enable you to be a tiger, a crane, a dragon or whatever. To this extent poetry isn't "about" experience at all, it enacts (or is an icon of) rhythmic/phonic "deep structures" of experience. The act of imaginative participation is structured by the sound/rhythm axis. 4

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1. Stephen Spender, The Making of a Poem (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1962), p.60.
  2. Donald Stauffer, "with Wordsworth as a guide," argues that "the pleasurable effect [of rhythm] is triple: intellectual, esthetic, and physiological. Intellectually, it pleases by its continuous although not obtrusive assurance that order, control, purposefulness are at work. Esthetically, its artificiality and formality hold us steadily; it leads us pleurably into the mood of imaginative contemplation, out of the real world of action and utility.... Physiologically, little more can be said with certainty than that men naturally delight in rhythm." The Nature of Poetry (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1946), p.193
  3. W.B. Yeats, "Symbolism in Painting," Essays and Introductions, p.159.
  4. Christopher Middleton, Agenda, 11 (Spring-Summer, 1973), p.56.

Yeats came to a similar conclusion in relating the rhythms of his own experience to his art; he too realized that "beauty" calcified and separated individual experience from the "rhythmic/phonic 'deep structures' of experience":

... I was interested in nothing but states of mind, lyrical moments, intellectual essences.... I had not learned what sweetness, what rhythmic movement, there is in those who have become the joy that is themselves. Without knowing it, I had come to care for nothing but impersonal beauty. I had set out on life with the thought of putting my very self into poetry, and had understood this as a representation of my own visions and an attempt to cut away the non-essential, but as I imagined the visions outside myself my imagination became full of decorative landscape and of still life. I thought of myself as something unmoving and silent living in the middle of my own mind and body, a grain of sand in Elocusbury or in Connacht that Satan's watch-fiends cannot find. Then one day I understood quite suddenly, as the way is, that I was seeking something unchanging and unmixed and always out of reach, and that I myself was the fleeting thing that held out its hand. The more I tried to make my art deliberately beautiful, the more did I follow the opposite of myself, for deliberate beauty is like a woman always desiring man's desire. Presently I found that I entered into myself and pictured myself and not some essence when I was not seeking beauty at all, but merely to lighten the mind of some burden of love or bitterness thrown upon it by the events of life. 1

Yeats's "discovery" was that art flows out of life and any art which does not attempt to re-enact or to approximate the rhythms of the "deep structures" of individual experience is a "still life." If aesthetic beauty is to be the means and end of art then the activity of individual experience exists only to be captured, disembodied, and solidified into a stasis. When Edgar Allan Poe said that the purpose of poetry is "the rhythmical creation of Beauty,"<sup>2</sup> he was striving after a pure and supernal beauty rather than multifarious and modulating earthly experience. Poe would not have been concerned about Yeats's discovery that essence may distil experience too much. Both had their eyes upon the soul but Poe never changed: "Beauty," Poe said, is "the atmosphere and essence of the poem" which should produce "the excitement, or pleasurable elevation of the soul."<sup>3</sup> By way of French symbolists, Yeats had taken up Poe's

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1. Yeats, "Discoveries," Essays and Introductions, pp.271-72.
  2. James A. Harrison, ed., The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe, XIV (New York: AMS Press Inc., 1965), p.275.
  3. Ibid., p.198.

dictum, but as we have seen, he rejected a symbolism which does not animate experience (whether he successfully divested his poems of the disembodied and inert symbol, I shall discuss later).

Yeats's considerations were aesthetics in relation with life. But another way of looking at aesthetics may be by way of reason. (One definition of aesthetics is that it is a kind of non-didactic reasoning, impersonal and objective, and objectively determinable.) What Yeats came to feel and understand was that aesthetics, or reason, is ultimately related to feelings: "the heart," as Pascal says, "has its reasons, which reason knows not." In his A Treatise of Human Nature, the philosopher David Hume argued the matter of experience and reason in terms of "passion and reason": "Reason is, and ought to be the slave of passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them."<sup>1</sup> Hume argued that when passions (he means "passions" in the broadest sense) are calm, we are tempted to equate this calmness with reason. But this calmness, similar to Yeats's feeling that he thought himself to be "as something unmoving and silent living in the middle of... [his] own mind and body," is deceptive because calmness may have nothing to do with reason. Reason alone does not ever motivate us into action - passion is the necessary impetus; and what is true of putting reason into action is also true of the cause of reason itself, for passion activates reason. In one sense reason is passion's slave but in another passion is reason's creator. At the outset of his Treatise, Hume says that "all perceptions of the human mind resolve themselves into two distinct kinds, which I shall call IMPRESSIONS and IDEAS."<sup>2</sup> But "impressions" (all of our sensations, passions, and emotions) are the source of all of our "ideas"; thus Hume's first general, and basic, proposition: "... all our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv'd from simple impressions, which are correspondent

1. David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature (London: Oxford University Press, 1888), p.415.

2. Ibid., p.1.

to them, and which they exactly represent."<sup>1</sup> So it was that Yeats would conclude, by way of his individual experience as he perceived that it related to aesthetics, "I was not seeking beauty at all, but merely to lighten the mind of some burden of love or bitterness thrown upon it by the events of life." Long before Hume and Yeats, Thomas Hobbes perceived that man, a creature of sense, can have nothing in his mind which is not caused by sensations: "... there is no conception in a man's mind, which hath not at first, totally, or by parts, been begotten upon the organs of sense."<sup>2</sup> In turn, man's experience, Hobbes argued, is his mental history which originates in the senses. Our senses set up movements in the brain which we call ideas; once the sense stimulus reaches the brain, it exists only in the mind as an image which slowly fades, a recollection of what was once in the senses. Hobbes called this consciousness of images the "imagination," an ability to recall sensations when they no longer exist; and, he concluded, "IMAGINATION therefore is nothing but decaying sense."<sup>3</sup> He saw the "imagination" as immediate and "memory" as distant: "This decaying sense... we call imagination...: but when we would express the decay, and signify the sense is fading, old, and past, it is called memory."<sup>4</sup> But the imagination (which Hobbes equates with memory) has a certain distancing quality he described as "simple imagination" and the "compound imagination." The "simple imagination" is an ability to call up separate after-images of sensation, "as when one imagineth a man, a horse, which he hath seen before"; the "compounded imagination" is an ability to compound different after-images of sensations, felt at different times, "as when, from the sight of a man at one time, and of a horse at another, we conceive in our mind a Centaur."<sup>5</sup> The English Romantic

1. Ibid., p.4.

2. Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. Michael Oakeshott (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960), p.7.

3. Ibid., p.9.

4. Ibid., p.10.

5. Ibid.

poets would take up these philosophic notions of the imagination, passion, and reason and make them central to their own poetics. Wordsworth, for example, observed that the poet is controlled by "passion and knowledge"<sup>1</sup> and that "the poet thinks and feels in the spirit of human passions."<sup>2</sup> Poetry, therefore, "is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind."<sup>3</sup>

We may conclude, thus far, that if the poetry of words (though set into what seems to be a reasoned form, order, or arrangement) actually flows out of the "passions" of experience, then the flow itself may be perceived as a self-ordering rhythm because of the "impressionistic" nature of individual reason which "girdles round" into a whole and because of the nature of individual experiences which are "deep structures." These examples from Hume to Yeats to Middleton of universal and individual rhythm (or energy or passion) becoming meaning and the preceding examples of the self-ordering rhythms of the mind suggest much more than the notion of metrical rhythm. The realization that a poem is "first... a particular rhythm before it reaches expression in words,"<sup>4</sup> and our reconsideration of physiological, psychological, and imaginative responses to rhythm suggest that to ignore these rhythms in our criticism is to do violence to the nature and intent of the poem. What is true of reason's source being passion or sensation is also true of judging a poem. When we read or hear a poem it makes an "impression" upon us; and, as we have seen, judgement cannot be pure reason for reason begins in the senses;

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1. William Wordsworth, Wordsworth: Poetical Works, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, rev. Ernest De Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), p.738.
  2. Ibid., pp.738-39.
  3. Ibid., p.740.
  4. Eliot, "The Music of Poetry," On Poetry and Poets, p.32.

thus, as Raymond Bayer observes, "it is the emotion remaining in me that my verdict of the thing [e.g. the poem] expresses."<sup>1</sup>

With these ideas of the impressionistic and self-ordering nature of rhythm, reason, and experience (particularly response and creation), we may now consider rhythm as a concept in critical analysis. We often find "rhythm" employed in criticism as something of a metaphor and yet not quite a metaphor. Richard Ellmann reviewed recently yet another critical work on James Joyce's Ulysses. Ellmann was not sympathetic with the critical approach as a whole, factually informing as he found the parts, because it ignored "the essential rhythms" of the novel.<sup>2</sup> Eighteen different essayists concentrated on one of the novel's eighteen sections, and "the effect of splitting up the novel this way," Ellmann objects, "is to lose sight of the 'wholeness, harmony and radiance' that Joyce intended it should manifest."<sup>3</sup> Ellmann expresses this wholeness, harmony, and radiance as a "rhythm," and he concludes his review by emphasizing "three basic rhythms" of the novel, these rhythms being thematic and narrative and bearing no direct reference to the sound rhythms of a line of poetry. "Rhythm," or its synonyms as in the following example, is often used in criticism to suggest not only the wholeness and harmony of a work but also its vitality, freshness, and spontaneity; for example, Malcolm Cowley describes Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" as

a rhapsody or tone poem, one that modulates from theme to theme, often changing in key and tempo, falling into reveries and rising toward moments of climax, but always preserving its unity of feeling as it moves onward in a wavelike flow.... The repetitions are always musical variations and amplifications.... He [Whitman] preferred to let one image suggest another image, which in turn suggests a new statement of mood or doctrine. 4

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1. Raymond Bayer, "The Essence of Rhythm," Reflections on Art, ed. Susanne K. Langer (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p.189.
  2. Richard Ellmann, "Pieces of Ulysses," The Times Literary Supplement, October 3, 1975, p.1118.
  3. Ibid.
  4. Malcolm Cowley, ed., Leaves of Grass : The First (1855) Edition (New York: The Viking Press, 1959), p.xvi.

Of course "rhythm" and similar descriptions seem especially accurate descriptions of Whitman's sense of "Life immense in passion, pulse, and power." But "rhythm" has also been regarded as an accurate appraisal of so unWhitmanlike a work as Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography.<sup>1</sup> One need not look very far beyond literary criticism to discover that we use the word "rhythm" frequently: we speak of the rhythm of the seasons, the rhythm of the sea, the rhythms of time (or in Kenneth Clark's phrase, the "rhythms of antiquity"), and even the rhythms of a spatial object like sculpture. But rhythm is not a critical word that has died from overuse; it still preserves its denotations and connotations of vitality, life, wholeness, harmony, spontaneity, and freshness.

I have noted the coalescence of rhythm and meaning, but it should not be forgotten that there is a more complex coalescence of rhythm, meaning, and emotion. F.O. Matthiessen in his book The Achievement of T.S. Eliot describes Eliot's poetic method as attempting "to suggest in the rhythms of his verse the movement of thought in the living mind, and thus communicate the exact pattern of his meaning not so much by logical structure as emotional suggestion."<sup>2</sup> But a writer like D.H. Lawrence stresses less the power of meaning and more the emotional power of rhythm. In a letter to Edward Marsh in November 1913, Lawrence defends and defines his idea of rhythm and its relation to emotion: rhythm is "movements in space"; it is not "footsteps hitting the earth," and, further,

It all depends on pause - the natural pause - the natural pause, the natural lingering of the voice according to the feeling - it is the hidden emotional pattern that makes poetry, not the obvious form. 3

"Pause" and "lingering" may be extremely difficult to judge. For example, how many ways can King Lear say "Never, never, never, never, never";

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1. Robert Sayre, "Images of Utopia," Salmagundi, 19 (Spring, 1972), p.31. ("The rhythm of the Autobiography is a whole interlocking series of philosophic ventures....")
  2. F.O. Matthiessen, The Achievement of T.S. Eliot (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), p.16.
  3. Cited by Partridge, The Language of Modern Poetry, p.54.

the emotional impact is there in part because of the events which build to the line and the line itself hammers out emotional stress, but in what rhythm should they be read? Pause may be emphasized typographically as in the first Dream Song "Huffy Henry hid the day," but the question of duration and inflection before and after the pause are not settled. Are we to take Lawrence's advice and let the voice linger "according to the feeling"? The answers to these questions seem to be relative to the poem and the reader or speaker; the most that can be asserted with assurance is that rhythm and emotion are in concord or discord with one another and may be powerfully expressive means.

In another of Matthiessen's books, a biographical-critical study of Theodore Dreiser, he returns to the concept of rhythm. Dreiser's main concern, Matthiessen says, is to stir "his readers to compassion; Dreiser arouses the reader's emotions because his prose is deeply grounded in the rhythm of his emotions."<sup>1</sup> How this came about Matthiessen is not able to say, but he does see "rhythm" as the very source of Dreiser's art, and he cites Dreiser's first impression of Chicago as an explanation and an example:

There was rhythm, rhythm, rhythm --- and somehow men and crowds and every moving thing fell into it, although they were unconscious of it. And in the rain and under umbrellas or raincoats or covered wagon-tops, all life seemed to flow so softly and so smoothly. But to where? And for what? 2

Berryman wrote a lengthy review of Matthiessen's book on Dreiser, and agreed with Matthiessen, as the title "Through Dreiser's Imagination the Tides of Real Life Billowed" suggests, that Dreiser's novels give a sense of the inexplicable and endless flux of life. Berryman felt that above all Matthiessen was right to suggest that "rhythm" is a "key to Dreiser's method,"<sup>3</sup> that is, to both his style and his narrative.

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1. F.O. Matthiessen, Theodore Dreiser (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1951), p.124.
  2. Ibid., p.124-25.
  3. John Berryman, "Through Dreiser's Imagination the Tides of Real Life Billowed," The New York Times Book Review, March 4, 1951, p.7.

In the same review, Berryman cites E.M. Forster's discussion of narrative in Aspects of the Novel where Forster summarizes the narrative of one of Sir Walter Scott's novels:

"And then?" he Forster says, and tells us what comes next. "And then?" "And then?" But suddenly the novel was over, and you must not -- says Forster acidly -- ask that question too often. 1

By way of Forster, Berryman is saying that Dreiser's novels, and all great novels, should not be reduced to an arid pattern of events -- "one does not," Berryman affirms, "rush on from chapter to chapter of Anna Karenina just to see what happens."<sup>2</sup> In short, the critic must, as Eliot says in his essay, "The Function of Criticism," "fuse criticism with creation," for "the critical activity finds its highest, its true fulfilment in a kind of union with creation in the labour of the artist."<sup>3</sup>

I find it significant that having agreed with Matthiessen that rhythm may be an important critical evaluation Berryman should think of Forster's Aspects of the Novel; for Forster devotes an important part of his book to "Pattern and Rhythm." Forster begins his discussion of "pattern" and "rhythm" by admitting that the two terms are vague: "... when people apply rhythm or pattern to literature they are apt not to say what they mean and not finish their sentences."<sup>4</sup> After several lengthy examples, Forster concludes that a "rigid pattern... may externalize the atmosphere, spring naturally from the plot, but it shuts the doors on life and leaves the novelist doing exercises, generally in the drawing room."<sup>5</sup> Forster then edges "rather nervously towards the idea of 'rhythm'"; he distinguishes between "easy" rhythm and "difficult" rhythm. "Easy" rhythm is easy to illustrate: "Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, for instance, starts with the rhythm 'diddidy dum,' which we can all hear and

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., p.29.

3. Eliot, "The Function of Criticism," Selected Essays, pp.31-32.

4. E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel and Related Writings, ed. Oliver Stallybrass (London: Edward Arnold, 1974), p.102.

5. Ibid., p.112.

tap our feet to";<sup>1</sup> but "difficult" rhythm is difficult because we are attempting to consider the effect of the whole work: Beethoven's Fifth Symphony "as a whole has also a rhythm -- due mainly to the relation between its movements -- which some people can hear but no one can tap to."<sup>2</sup> Easy rhythm, "repetition plus variation,"<sup>3</sup> is similar to pattern and is like scanning a line of poetry into so many feet. A scansion may tell us how the critic hears the line, but the facts of meter are only part way towards the reader's knowing and feeling in his bones the whole poem. We may analyze the machinery of the thumping metrics of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (for example, "I bit my arm, I sucked the blood/ And cried, A sail! a sail!"), but a simple de dum, de dum, de dum falls short of the "difficult" rhythm in which the poem as a whole draws us into the Mariner's mysterious world. The best Forster can manage in defining "difficult" rhythm is to describe it in terms of its function -- "not to be there all the time like a pattern, but by its lovely waxing and waning to fill us with surprise and freshness and hope."<sup>4</sup> Rhythm "done badly," Forster says, is "most boring, it hardens into a symbol, and instead of carrying us on it trips us up."<sup>5</sup> When rhythm is done well (and therefore "difficult"), we have an "untidy book" like War and Peace. Untidiness, that essential quality of "difficult" rhythm, leads the writer and the reader towards a sense of the flux of life, a mimesis of the flow of living. "Expansion," Forster stresses, "that is the idea the novelist must cling to. Not completion. Not rounding off but opening out."<sup>6</sup>

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1. Ibid., p.113.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p.115.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., p.116.

Forster intended that "difficult rhythm" should apply to literature, but except for his brief example of War and Peace, he settles for illustrations from music. Of course analogies may help explain, but they are not to be taken as the argument itself. The poet may learn from music certain truths about his own art, but, as W.H. Auden once pointed out, music is not poetry:

Man is an analogy-drawing animal; that is his great good fortune. His danger is of treating analogies as identities, of saying for instance, "Poetry should be as much like music as possible." I suspect that the people who are most like to say this are tone-deaf.<sup>1</sup>

Forster's error, then, is to rely too much on musical analogy. So in shaping the contours of the literary concept of rhythm, and in excluding the notion that a poem should be as much like music as possible, I exclude music as a basis for the concept of rhythm, though its value as an analogy may be useful. We may, nevertheless, take Forster's other leads and say that rhythm is not pattern, rhythm is not the mechanical approximation of the click of the metronome. And his distinction between "easy rhythm" (or simple rhythm) and "difficult rhythm" (or complex rhythm) is a useful point of reference.

I have not excluded much; indeed, the idea of rhythm as a critical principle is nearly unwieldy, but as such it animates, and makes allowance for, the rough edges of a great and difficult work like War and Peace which Forster saw as a great achievement precisely because of its untidiness. The virtue of rhythm as a critical principle is its accommodation of diversity, and, at the same time, brings diversity around into a determinable field of reference. The literary concept of rhythm allows us to discuss critically either technical matters such as meter, or broader matters such as meaning and emotion, or voice, or theme, or tone, or tension, or texture, or image, metaphor and symbol, or long and short works.

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1. W.H. Auden, "Making, Knowing, and Judging," The Dyer's Hand (New York: Random House, 1962), pp.51-52.

(I emphasize "diversity," rather than "variety," because rhythm is a means of discussing a work coherently and precisely.) Now diversity in criticism, as M.H. Abrams says, is "not to be deplored"; in fact, a good critical theory, Abrams proposes,

has its own kind of validity. The criterion is not the scientific verifiability of its single propositions, but the scope, precision, and coherence that it yields into the properties of single works of art.... 1

Such a critical theory would set bounds but allow for the impossibility of setting "arbitrary bounds to the area of suggestiveness of any good poem or story."<sup>2</sup> And such a critical theory would not only be complementary to the art it interprets, but also become a similar activity to that of creating art. These claims I make for the literary concept of rhythm.

The examples of rhythm thus far have permitted us to perceive some of the properties and characteristics of rhythm as a concept: its self-ordering energy and motion in time; its "wholeness, harmony and radiance"; its scope, precision and coherence. Energy, as we have determined, is the activating, sustaining and self-ordering force of rhythm; motion and time are properties of energy. As for scope, precision and coherence, a display of these in the next section, when we look at Berryman's poetry, will, I believe, make them apparent. I wish to return to Joyce's insistence upon "wholeness, harmony, and radiance" which should help illumine and sharpen the concept of rhythm. Joyce had in mind that wholeness, harmony, and radiance are the essential qualities of beauty. It would serve no purpose here to discuss Joyce's notion of "beauty," nor would it fragment Joyce's entire theory to ignore beauty altogether and concentrate upon these three qualities as "phases of apprehension." ("Wholeness, harmony and radiance" may be separated from a discussion of

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1. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp, pp.4-5.

2. John Berryman, et.al. The Arts of Reading (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1960), p.431.

beauty. They correspond to the three phases of apprehension, and it is the three phases of apprehension which are important to my argument.) In A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Stephen makes a grand, but accurate, claim for rhythm:

Rhythm... is the first formal esthetic relation of part to part in esthetic whole or of any esthetic whole to its part or parts or of any part to the esthetic whole of which it is part. 1

Without suggesting what this rhythm is, Stephen's clever riddle states simply that rhythm binds and holds together the parts and wholes of a work of art. As he takes his cues from Aquinas, he goes on to say that to apprehend wholeness (integritas) is to apprehend one thing, as when the eye singles out one object among other objects; this is the first of the three rapidly successive stages of apprehension. Although Joyce says that this first phase of wholeness is "presented to us in time or in space," he ignores time and gives only an example of spatial wholeness (when our eye singles out a basket and draws a "bounding line... about the object apprehended"<sup>2</sup>). The next phase of apprehension is harmony (consonantia), in which the viewer apprehends a "balanced part against part within its limits" of an object and feels into "the rhythm of its structure."<sup>3</sup> In the first phase of apprehension, wholeness, the basket is seen as one thing; in this second phase, harmony, the basket is apprehended as a thing, "complex, multiple, divisible, separable, made up of its parts, the result of its parts their sum, harmonious."<sup>4</sup> The third phase of apprehension, radiance (claritas), presents some difficulty both to Stephen and the reader. Stephen finally concludes that radiance, is the moment when the mind apprehends an object "luminously," that instant

1. James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1916), p.206.

2. Ibid., p.212.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

which Shelley likened to a fading coal. The mind, having been "arrested" by the wholeness of an object and fascinated by its harmony, comes to a state of awareness, a "radiance," a "luminous silent stasis of esthetic pleasure" which Stephen claims is a "spiritual state" and an enchantment of the heart."<sup>1</sup>

Stephen's (Joyce's) descriptions of wholeness and harmony fuse easily enough with the concept of rhythm as I have described it. And his assumption that wholeness and harmony are not perfect<sup>2</sup> applies to the concept of rhythm as well: rhythm is not perfectly whole, yet is wholeness; rhythm is not pure harmony, yet it is harmonious. But "radiance" does not fuse so easily into the concept of rhythm. In fact, it seems to me that even within Joyce's theory, the notion of "radiance" will not bear as much weight as he lays claim to. We can perhaps allow, and be comfortable with, radiance as "an enchantment of the heart," but radiance as "a spiritual state" is simply not convincing as a general statement about the nature of apprehending a spatial object (the exception being a mystic's exercise), or for apprehending beauty, or for apprehending a temporal work like a poem. But where the concept of rhythm, as I see it, conflicts most with "radiance" as a phase of apprehension is Joyce's insistence upon a "silent stasis." If the last phase of apprehension, either spatial or temporal, is anything at all, it is a paradoxical "dynamic stasis" which may be likened to Eliot's image of stillness as "a Chinese jar still/Moves perpetually in its stillness." Significantly, throughout Stephen's (Joyce's) argument, he ignores temporal apprehension. His example of an inert spatial object allows him to manipulate his argument; it allows him to transfer the stillness of the object to his

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1. Joyce, "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man," p.213.

2. See Maurice Beebe, "Joyce and Aquinas: The Theory of Aesthetics," James Joyce: "Dubliners" and "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man." ed. Morris Beja (London: Macmillan, 1973), p.163.

conclusion of "silent stasis."<sup>1</sup> Had he considered more that which is "presented in time," it would be apparent that in effect he was regarding only one frame in a continuing reel of frames. Had he considered rhythm less<sup>as</sup> an inert aesthetic relation of parts and more as a dynamic physiological and psychological expression and response, he would not have concluded that rhythm directs us towards a "silent stasis."<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, his views of wholeness (seeing one thing) and especially of harmony (seeing one thing, "complex, multiple, divisible, separable, made up of its parts, the result of its parts, their sum, harmonious") help define wholeness and harmony which are the dominant traits of the concept of rhythm.

I return to the point with which I began: a poem which comes out of experience should be experienced. John Middleton Murry says that poetry is "not what some have (in intention, rightly) maintained it is -- namely, communication -- whether of mere emotion, which would be sensation, or of mere thought." Then Murry offers a succinct definition of poetry: "It is the communication of an entire experience."<sup>3</sup> I have been attempting to hold this point in mind: I have been attempting to suffuse into a critical approach the shifting contours of what

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1. It is questionable whether the act of apprehending an object even permits a silent stasis. Micheline Sauvage argues that "the eye is not content with a single perusal" of an object; the eye repeats the process until it establishes a 'determinant dynamic'. See "Notes on the Superposition of Temporal Modes" in Reflections on Art, ed. Susanne Langer (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p.163.
  2. Joyce did, however, consider temporal apprehension in his early drafts of A Portrait of the Artist: "The features of infancy are not commonly reproduced in the adolescent portrait for, so capricious are we, that we cannot or will not conceive the past in any other than its iron memorial aspect. Yet the past assuredly implies a fluid succession of presents, the development of an entity of which our actual present is a phase only." See Robert Scholes and Richard M. Kain, eds., The Workshop of Daedalus: James Joyce and the Raw Materials for "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man" (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), p.40.
  3. John Middleton Murry, "Pure Poetry," Countries of the Mind: Second Series (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p.25.

experience involves. I readily admit to a contradiction in what I have attempted in my critical approach to poetry, namely, once I say "critical approach," I am no longer experiencing the poetry. My first assumption has been that the experience of poetry and the criticism of poetry are not the same. Some years before John Bayley made his case for our observing the "ghost" in a poem, A.C. Bradley, uncannily anticipating the bright new machinery of criticism which would come in the 1930's and onwards, asked the essential question concerning the experience of a poem: "When you are reading a poem, I would ask -- not analysing it, and much less criticizing it, but allowing it, as it proceeds, to make its full impression on you through the exertion of your imagination -- do you then apprehend and enjoy as one thing a certain meaning or substance, and as another thing certain articulate sounds, and do you somehow compound these two?" Bradley answers his question:

Surely you do not, any more than you apprehend apart, when you see some one smile, those lines in the face which express a feeling, and the feeling that the lines express. Just as there the lines and their meaning are to you one thing, not two, so in poetry the meaning and sound are one: there is, if I may put it so, a resonant meaning, or a meaning resonance. If you read, the lines, 'The sun is warm, the sky is clear,' you do not experience separately the image of the warm sun and clear sky, on the one side, and certain unintelligible rhythmical sounds on the other; nor yet do you experience them together, side by side; but you experience the one in the other. Afterwards, no doubt, when you are out of the poetic experience but remember it, you may by analysis decompose this unity, and attend to substance more or less isolated, and a form more or less isolated. But these are things in your analytic head, not in the poem, which is the poetic experience. And if you want the poem again, you cannot find it by adding together these two products of decomposition; you can only find it by passing back into the poetic experience. And then what you recover is no aggregate of factors, it is a unity in which you can no more separate a substance and a form than you can separate living blood and the life in blood. 1

Bradley does not deny the value of criticism; to write about "style or versification" as though they were independent elements, he says, "is

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1. A.C. Bradley, "Poetry for Poetry's Sake, Oxford Lectures on Poetry (Macmillan and Co.Ltd., 1965), pp.14-15.

both legitimate and valuable," and then Bradley adds sharply, "so long as we remember what we are doing."<sup>1</sup> In using the concept of rhythm as a critical approach, however, we may analyze matters of style or versification, but not separately for long because the concept itself demands that we remember all along what we are doing, that is, we must refer back to the source of style and versification. Admittedly, the concept of rhythm is not the poem itself, but it is more than an "aggregate of factors"; I would call it the "flow of factors," an inquiry into how it is and what it is that proceeds to make its full impression on us. I have attempted to undermine, and yet to use in a different way, the view that the experience of a poem is demonstrable. The result is that my argument is made up of principles which are more thickly related than rigidly constructed.

Finally we come to this: out of the complex rhythms of experience the poet creates his poem which is a complex of rhythms and which, in turn, subjects whoever experiences the poem to its rhythms. The poet and the reader's experiences are demonstrable but not definable because their experiences are both perceptible and inward, and rhythm and the concept of rhythm provide a means of relating them. Rhythm is "the true intersection," as Raymond Bayer says in his essay "The Essence of Rhythm," "of the interior domain and the realm of things."<sup>2</sup> We may see the literary concept of rhythm as a dynamic cornucopia which begins with the essence (rhythm) and spirals outward to hold the experience of a poem. Some poems will not call for a large cornucopia, but for those that do, the concept dilates accordingly. My discussion thus far has been of a general nature, an inquiry into the nature of rhythm and an attempt to shade some contours of the concept of rhythm. Let us turn now to a consideration of how the concept works and how it particularly suits a study of John Berryman's poetry.

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1. Ibid., p.16.

2. Bayer, "The Essence of Rhythm," p.193.

### ii. The Simple and Complex Rhythms of Berryman's Poetry

Poetry, Berryman believed, aims at nothing less than "the reformation of the poet, as prayer does."<sup>1</sup> But he understood as well that the reformation (or re-formation) of the poet, or <sup>of</sup> any person, is never complete because of man's changing nature and because of the nature of the poet's relation to his poem. "Writing poetry," Berryman said, "is a funny business":

Something happens in your mind, and it happens extremely fast, namely in three or four hours. I write a song... and then go to bed. Meanwhile, I figure that this is the most marvelous song ever written by anybody in the entire world, and I ring up my friends in various parts of the country and read it to them.... They never have any suggestions to make. They all think it's marvelous also.

Then an awful thing happens. One, I lose interest in that song -- namely I figure it's no good. Secondly, I stamp up and down and I feel very bad, because I can't any more use it as a weapon against gentility. 2

Then there follows a period of revising and re-revising the poem with a Wordsworthian hope of getting it near the original feeling: "you wipe out all the defects that you have inserted."<sup>3</sup> Berryman's sense of personal intensity in the act of making a poem predictably determined his critical criteria for all poetry; in more than one review he holds up the standards of "personal intensity"<sup>4</sup> and "urgency and power"<sup>5</sup> in judging poetry. Intensity, urgency, and power were not Berryman's only criteria, but the sense of vitality that they suggest always were important to his critical judgements. Just as he would emphasize the vitality of the complex rhythms of Anna Karenina so he would emphasize the essentially vital nature of one's response to the blood image-patterns

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1. Berryman, "The Revolving Bookstand," p.386.
  2. Bob Lunegaard, "Song of a Poet: John Berryman," Minneapolis Morning Tribune, June 27, 1965, p.1.
  3. Ibid.
  4. See John Berryman, "Young Poets Dead," Sewanee Review, 55 (July-September 1947), 505.
  5. See John Berryman, "New Books of Verse," The New York Times Book Review, March 18, 1945, p.10.

in Macbeth:

... the reader responds both emotionally and intellectually to the image-patterns. One both suffers and enjoys (understands) the Blood Image-pattern: one recoils emotionally and sees its points -- that "blood will have blood," there is a Nemesis, and this is satisfying, in a world so terrifying and chaotic as the world of Macbeth. 1

On the other hand, Berryman's derivative and finely wrought early poetry (ca. 1935-1945) tempts one to isolate his craftsmanship. But even during these early apprentice years he aimed at a life-giving, life-enacting art. In his introduction to his first collection of poems (1940), he suggested that the craft of poetry is a secondary consideration: "one of the reasons for writing verse is a delight in craftsmanship -- rarely for its own sake, mainly as it seizes and makes visible its subject."<sup>2</sup> Important as "craftsmanship" was to Berryman, he was far more interested in seizing experience and making it visible, though he was slow to fuse this principle into his poetry. In the same introduction he also emphasized the feeling and the sense of experience the poem should arouse in the reader:

Poetry provides its readers... with what we may call a language of experience, an idiom, of which the unit may be an entire complicated emotion or incident. The language is not the language of prose. It requires a different process of sensibility, and probably the most relevant questions raised for a reader by any poems have to do with the approach toward an ideal of reading. 3

But the craftsmanship of poetry is not easily fused with life and experience it wants to animate; Berryman's long apprenticeship is a testament to that difficulty. Randall Jarrell, with his characteristic perceptive sharpness, said of some of Berryman's early "political poems": "nothing can make me believe that Mr. Berryman wrote this himself, and is not just shielding someone."<sup>4</sup> Auden's political poems were in the

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1. Berryman, et.al., The Arts of Reading, p.449.
  2. John Berryman, "A Note on Poetry," preface to "Twenty Poems" in Five Young American Poets (Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1940), p.47. Hereafter references to "Twenty Poems" will be cited internally as 20P.
  3. Ibid., p.48.
  4. Randall Jarrell, "In All Directions," Partisan Review, Vol.9 (July, 1942), 347.

air at the time and Berryman was unsuccessfully trying his hand at political themes in Auden's style. Berryman's greatest difficulty was in shaking the heavy influence of W.B. Yeats. Yeats's high-style and grandiloquence would inevitably reduce imitation to hollowess and make any imitator's own "language of experience" sound like a lesser Yeats, and Berryman was no exception. But he listened to other "law-givers"; in his "serpentine researches," he came upon the "comprehensive air of majesty" in the criticism of R.P. Blackmur. Berryman recalled, over thirty years later, the "sublime assurance" of Blackmur's conviction regarding the possibilities of poetry:

'The art of poetry  
is amply distinguished from the manufacture of verse  
by the animating presence in poetry  
of a fresh idiom: language

so twisted and posed in a form  
that it not only expresses the matter in hand,  
but adds to the stock of available reality.' 1

Then Berryman added, "I was never altogether the same after that." Just as one is tempted to look only at the "craftsmanship" of Berryman's early poetry so it is a temptation to dwell upon language "twisted and posed in a form" in his later poetry. But more should be made of the notion of "animating presence in poetry." A poem which "adds to the stock of available reality" is a poem, as I understand it, which so recreates, stirs, and makes visible experience that it adds to the reader's own sense of reality, and this may be done only by allowing and demanding that the reader participate in the poem.

Exactly how experience is brought into a form and then dissolved back into experience is not easy to determine, but Berryman believed that form was seminal to the process. His own development may be seen as a lover's quarrel with form -- from a Parnassian, artificial sense to a more vital, organic sense. Paradoxically, even after his own poetic powers

1. John Berryman, "Olympus," Love and Fame (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1971), p.27. Hereafter cited internally as L. & F.

were strong and mature, he continued to model his poetry upon some established form, but by that time he knew how to inject his own vitality into a form. His versatile, "down-light, missile-metal-hard" stanzas of The Dream Songs Berryman himself compared with a sonnet, "an extended, three-part sonnet."<sup>1</sup> Out of Yeats's eight-line stanza of "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory" Berryman said that he "invented" his own stanza for Homage to Mistress Bradstreet. He described some of the technical differences between Yeats's stanza and his own, but he was most pleased with what he felt was a life-giving effect: "something at once flexible and grave, intense and quiet, able to deal with matter both high and low."<sup>2</sup> In Berryman's early poetry his most sustained effort in an established form was his sonnets, written in 1947. But all the while he was held in tow by this strict form, he experimented with syntax and diction as a way to animate experience:

I prod our English: cough me up a word,  
 Slip me an epithet will justify  
 My daring fondle, fumble of far fire  
 Crackling nearby, unreasonable as a surd,  
 A flash of light, an insight....<sup>3</sup>

One still hears Hopkins, but by the time he wrote The Dream Songs, the form, syntax, and style were all Berryman's voice:

Spellbound held subtle Henry all four  
 hearers in the racket of the market  
 with ancient sighs, infamous characters,  
 new rhythms. 4

Whenever Henry calls attention to form or style, as he does in the above example, he usually declares the "animating presence" in poetry he

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1. David McClellan, et al., "An Interview with John Berryman," The Harvard Advocate, CIII (Spring 1969), 8.
  2. John Berryman, "One Answer to a Question," Shenandoah, 27 (Autumn 1965), 73.
  3. John Berryman, "Sonnet 66," Berryman's Sonnets (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1967), no page no. Hereafter cited internally as B.S.
  4. John Berryman, Dream Song 71 / 77 Dream Songs (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1964), p.78. Hereafter all references to The Dream Songs will be cited internally as The D.S. All references will be taken from the above 77 Dream Songs and from His Toy, His Dream, His Rest (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1969).

desires. R.P. Blackmur dies and Henry laments, "what rhythm shall we use for Richard's death...?" (The D.S. V, 173); Henry calls his Songs "open & closed songs" (The D.S. VI, 260); his Songs flow out of a "grave ground-rhythm" (The D.S. III, 43); and he wants them to be "Scarlati-supple" (The D.S. V, 103). (A number of allusions to music and musicians through<sup>out</sup> The Dream Songs reinforces his desire for an "animating presence" and suggests Forster's idea of "difficult rhythm.") Henry considers

... a song will be as humming-bird  
swift, down-light, missile-metal-hard, & strange  
where they are wondering....

(The D.S. V, 103)

The form and the words of a Song are meant to be both "down-light" and "missile-metal-hard," extremes of spirit and concreteness which touch "the means/whereby we come to life" (The D.S. VII, 305).

"Animating presence" in poetry is not only a matter of form and style, it is also a matter of hearing a poem. In an essay on Ezra Pound (1949), Berryman said that writing poetry is a matter of "ear":

We write verse -- was it Renoir, 'I paint with my penis' -- we write verse with our ears; so this is important. Forming, animating, quelling his material, that ear is one of the main weird facts of modern verse.... The poet has listened to life so to speak, and he tells us what he hears. 1

Poetry which is "heard" in experience and written with the "ear" must be "heard" in the fullest sense of both reading and hearing. Many do not fully experience a poem because, Berryman says, "people read with their eyes, not their ears."<sup>2</sup> Someone who could not make sense of 77 Dream Songs asked Berryman's wife Kate how to begin; her advice was, "well, it's very simple. Just read the first one over and over and over until you hear it. Then read the others." Then Berryman added, "Well, that's good advice."<sup>3</sup>

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1. John Berryman, "The Poetry of Ezra Pound," Partisan Review, XVI (April 1949), 389.
  2. Howard, "Whisky and Ink, Whisky and Ink," p.76.
  3. Jonathan Sisson, "My Whiskers Fly: An Interview with John Berryman," Ivory Tower, XIV (October 3, 1966), 34.

Those who heard Berryman read his Dream Songs confirm the accuracy of Mrs. Berryman's advice. Michael Dennis Browne, for example, describes his trying to hear The Dream Songs with his English ear:

When I first came to read them [77 Dream Songs] ... in the Spring of 1966, ... I was young and English, and I had some very different kinds of diction in my head. I didn't know much of what was going on in the poems at all. The poems were tricky; and quite a few of them still are for me.... And something in me at the time resisted them; the idiom was too eccentric to take root in the deepest places in my head, where the best poems have seemed to go. It wasn't until I heard John Berryman himself read from the Dream Songs [sic] in Iowa City in the Spring of 1968 -- the first time I had ever seen or heard him -- that I began to feel the real power and energy of the poems.

He read them from the center of a large stage, to a large audience. He read them slowly -- more slowly at times than I would have thought possible -- but there were also variations within this slowness, sudden bursts and accelerations, sudden drastic increases in volume. And the poems came over to the audience with an extraordinary combination of authority and intimacy -- a kind of lyrical power that I had not heard in spoken poetry before. 1

Even Robert Lowell's sure American ear could not at first hear 77 Dream Songs; he says that he was "rattled by their mannerisms." But once he "heard" the Songs he admitted, "No voice now or persona sticks in my ear as his.... We should hear him read aloud."<sup>2</sup> Of course most of The Dream Songs especially demand to be heard, but all other good poems -- their variations, their slowness, and their sudden bursts -- must also be heard if they are to be experienced.

In considering the poem of "animating presence," we must give attention to not only our "hearing" and the poet's creating the style, voice, and form of a poem, but also to matters of method, such as dramatization and the important matter of the sense of experience the poem allows. Berryman's steady, though spasmodic, progress towards

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1. Michael Dennis Browne, "Henry Fermenting: Debts to the Dream Songs," Ohio Review, Vol.15 (Winter 1974), 76. For an interesting transcription of Berryman's reading of the first Dream Song see Clifford Adelman's "A Too Brief Homage to John Berryman," Chicago Review, Vol.24 (Spring 1973), 124.
  2. Robert Lowell, "For John Berryman," The New York Review of Books, XVIII (April 6, 1972), 3.

realizing an "animating presence" in his poetry may be roughly illustrated by looking closely at several exemplary poems which span the whole of his career. I have chosen these four particular poems for several reasons: each reveals Berryman's major concerns and realizations at that stage of his career; each demonstrates a different style, form and method; and each may be easily compared and contrasted with the other three because the image of the dancer is important to all four poems. The first poem, "Lead Out the Weary Dancers" (1935)<sup>1</sup> was among Berryman's first published poems. The second poem, "Canto Amor,"<sup>2</sup> was published about twelve years later and collected in The Dispossessed. The third poem<sup>3</sup> is one of the concluding Dream Songs and comes about twenty years after "Canto Amor." And the last poem, "King David Dances,"<sup>4</sup> was published just over a month after Berryman's death and was the final poem in his posthumous volume Delusions, Etc.

In form and subject "Lead Out the Weary Dancers" suggests the Songs of Blake and Yeats but in hesitating style sounds like Emily Dickinson. The poet-persona wants "to know" and "to see" how life and experience are bound to, but delimited by, art; the complete poem follows:

Lead out the weary dancers  
 After the dance is done:  
 Lead out, and posture them  
 Under the stable sun --

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1. John Berryman, "Lead Out the Weary Dancers," The Columbia Review, XVI (April 1935), 23.
  2. John Berryman, "Canto Amor," The Sewanee Review, LV (Winter 1947), 68-70.
  3. John Berryman, √Dream Song 382√, His Toy, His Dream, His Rest, p.314.
  4. John Berryman, "King David Dances," The New Yorker, XLVII (February 19, 1972), 42. See also Delusions, Etc. (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1972), p.70. Hereafter cited internally as D.E.

The fingers thus, and hand  
Uplifted toward the sky;  
And close the vacant eyes,  
Stifle the final sigh.

And suffer me to see  
The symbol I shall know  
Without a finger pointed,  
And suffer me to go

With eyes upon a mountain  
Immutable of height  
And mind within the eyes  
And the journey bright. 1

The simple iambic cadences of these traditional ballad stanzas require little effort to hear. But unlike the simplicity of the ballad narrative, the sense of this poem is not immediately understood. Its quick rhythm stirs the reader and fulfils Yeats's notion that rhythm "prolongs the moment of contemplation." In the first stanza the repetition of "lead out" and the end-rhymes of the second and fourth lines complement the steady iambic meter which is establishing itself and will draw the reader through the poem. But the meter is not rigidly iambic; several trochaic feet at the beginning of lines two and four signal important comments on the dance ("after the dance is done") and the dancers ("under the stable sun"). Other variations of meter function similarly ("stifle the final sigh"), and the repeated phrase, "suffer me," turns an apostrophe into a question and stresses the speaker's need for someone to give him assurance. In terms of anticipated rhyme we might say that the second stanza is flawed; we expect the second and fourth lines to rhyme ("sky" and "sigh"), but the third line in between interrupts with the near rhyme "eyes." Modern ears have been trained to allow a flexibility in rhyme scheme, but when we hear a single variation in a traditional form it is difficult to accept; the variation disrupts the anticipated flow. We make allowances, however, for variations of meter in traditional verse, but the variations must be used sparingly and carefully calculated. The metric variations I have noted add to the

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1. Berryman, "Lead Out the Weary Dancers," p.23.

meaning, but in the last stanza the polysyllabic "immutable" to some ears might loosen too much the anticipated rhythm. On the other hand, to some ears the small metric variation of "immutable" not only calls attention to the unchanging nature of the height of the mountain but also prepares us for the relaxed rhythm of the last line, "And the journey bright." The loose rhythm of this line is a small calculation to end the poem with a kind of roughness in that the sudden loss of a strong rhythm subtly underplays the romantic expression of a "bright journey." Where the poem as a whole does seem to me to fall short of being successful is that Berryman attempts to express a Blakean profundity in too few stanzas, with too little concreteness and with a minimum of animation. Where Blake's "The Tyger" or "The Little Black Boy" give us enough concreteness to hold on to as we are led into deeper and more complex meanings, Berryman relies too much upon vagueness to carry his deeper meaning.

But "Lead Out the Weary Dancers" is not a wholly obscure poem. Both the rhythm and the concreteness of the opening line are arresting and clear, rhythm coalesces with meaning. The second line tells us that the dancers are to be led out after the dance. Who the dancers are and what they dance we are not told; given the formal tone and imagery we can be sure that they are not from a dance hall. Perhaps the dancers are meant to be seen as Yeatsian dancers who represent a unification of body and soul. In a poem published a year after "Lead Out the Weary Dancers" Berryman would advise "a young artist beginning her work":

Create the bones, the skin,  
 And when the flesh is packed  
 Carefully there, the soul  
 Will appear and control. 1

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1. John Berryman, "To a Young Artist Beginning Her Work" Columbia Poetry 1936 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), p.11.

But, in the context of "Lead Out the Weary Dancers," we cannot be sure what the dancers are meant to suggest; we only know that they have finished their dance. After their dance the dancers are to be led out (from where we are not told) and they are to be held in a "posture" and "under the stable sun." The "stable" sun suggests that all about the statue-dancers will stop as well. So the first stanza moves from the actual and immediate ("the weary dancers") to the symbolic and permanent (dancers in a "posture" and under the "stable sun"). The sun (perhaps in the Blakean sense of a symbol of the imagination) will be fixed, unchanging, resisting motion as the dancers will be, a juxtaposition of the timeless (held in time) and the temporal made timeless. We are not meant to visualize the posture of the dancers; "the fingers thus" tells us nothing. And we may wonder why only one hand is "uplifted toward the sky." Are there still several dancers? Sense begins to fragment. The first half of the poem (the first two stanzas) ends with a final injunction that the dancers be hardened into a form, their "vacant eyes" closed and their "final sigh" stifled.

The last two stanzas shift from the statue-dancers to the poet-persona's own concerns: he wants not only "to see" but also "to know" the symbol he has been creating. Apparently the poet's apostrophes have all along been addressed to himself: he wants to lead out the weary dancers, and he wants to posture them. Now he addresses someone, probably the muse of poetry. He wishes to be allowed to understand the meaning of the symbol. The alliterative, "suffer," "see," and "symbol" and the internal rhyme "me to see" force our attention upon his intense desire to know intuitively the symbol as a physical presence not merely an after-image in the mind. He is seeking after something solid yet infinite, something perpetually moving yet staying in place, something he can know "without a finger pointed." In the lines "And suffer me to see/The symbol I shall know,"

I hear the echo of St. Paul, "For now we see through a glass, darkly... now I know in part" (I Corinthians 13:12). But St. Paul's acceptance of never really knowing (until he meets God) is not the wisdom of the young poet who is beginning his journey towards understanding. The poet-persona is not deterred; he strains after the mysterious for he feels there is an "immutable" mountain of truth. But it is open to question whether he actually does know what he wants: his eyes are fixed upon a mountain rather than the mountain; and the mountain he seeks to climb is not itself "immutable" but rather "immutable of height." He senses that something out there, though immutable and out of reach, is nevertheless obtainable. Unlike the dancers who are "weary" and are to be made durable figures, the mountain exists and is durable. There is a strong suggestion that "a mountain" might be a Parnassian mountain of art: the dancers are to be led out under an Apollonian sun (Apollo being the god of poetry) and the poet gazes at a mountain wanting to know what a symbol means. We can be sure of what the poet wants: unlike the "vacant eyes" of the dazed dancers, his eyes are to be fixed and purposeful and his mind is to be "within the eyes." This is to suggest infusing the mind with the senses, a sort of reversal, and yet the same notion, of David Hume and Thomas Hobbes's principle that the senses are the source of the mind's activity which we call thought; as Hobbes says, "... there is no conception in a man's mind, which hath not at first, totally, or by parts, been begotten upon the organs of sense."<sup>1</sup> (Later Berryman reflected that among his "Sophomore heroes" at Columbia, during which time "Lead Out the Weary Dancers" was written, David Hume "stood high" with him (L. & F., p.307.) It is very likely too that Berryman would have read Eliot on the metaphysical and French symbolist poets whom Eliot had praised for their ability to transmute

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1. Hobbes, Leviathan, p.7.

ideas into sensations.

"Mind within the eyes" of course is a variation of the "mind's eye"; given Berryman's interest in Yeats's symbolism, he might have known Yeats's essay "Symbolism in Painting" where he says that the "mind's eye... comes to see a capricious and variable world, which the will cannot shape or change, though it can call it up and banish it again."<sup>1</sup> The poet of "Lead Out the Weary Dancers" considers the same dilemma: he sees a capricious and variable world which he cannot shape or change, but feels that he can call it up and shape it. His hope is that if he keeps his eyes upon an immutable mountain as he journeys towards it and if he infuses his "mind within the eyes" then the capricious and variable world he lives in may be called into some order of being by virtue of being thought and experienced. Thus, on one level, the poem is about the connection between the mind's eye and present experience.

But "Lead Out the Weary Dancers" is also about the mind's eye and the past and the individual's past experience. Berryman's choice and use of particular symbols (the dancer, the sun, the sky, the mountain) suggests Yeats's view of the power of symbols to evoke our memories which are "a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself."<sup>2</sup> The difficulty in using any symbols, as Berryman and Yeats discovered, is that they may not evoke anything at all; they may merely be a riddle which the reader solves. What should be "natural" seems "unnatural"; the symbols remain inert and wait to yield themselves up to a meaning. In "Lead Out the Weary Dancers," the dancers, the sun, the sky, the mountain (or a mountain) do not exist in themselves, but in what they represent. Nevertheless, this is precisely the point of the poem: symbols should be known individually by the senses; and they should in turn evoke the "one great memory."

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1. Yeats, "Symbolism in Painting," Essays and Introductions, p.151.

2. Yeats, "Magic," Essays and Introductions, p.28.

"Lead Out the Weary Dancers" is only one of several poems in which Berryman reveals his early preoccupation with the relation between life and art. Many of his early poems are about poets, Hart Crane, William Blake, Edwin Arlington Robinson, or about art, "Ars Poetica" (published in two versions) and "To an Artist Beginning Her Work." He was a young poet learning his craft, trying to get the best of words and the experience they express. In Love & Fame he recalls those difficult days as an undergraduate at Columbia when he was "Nowhere":

Traitoring words, -- tearing my thought across  
bearing it to foes.  
Two men ahead of me in line in the College Study  
about the obscurity of my 'Elegy: Hart Crane'.

(L. & F., p.29)

And later he admits "I couldn't sculpt into my helpless verse yet" (L. & F., p.34), but he would still search intensely at Cambridge for strength in his verse:

Will I ever write properly, with passion & exactness,  
of the damned strange demeanours of my flagrant heart?  
& be by anyone anywhere undertaken?  
one more unanswerable question.

(L. & F., p.51)

Mark Van Doren, who was Berryman's fatherly mentor at Columbia, said that as a student Berryman "was first and last a literary youth: all of his thought sank into poetry, which he studied and wrote as if there were no other exercise for the human brain. Slender, abstracted, courteous, he loved one life alone, and walked with verse as in a trance."<sup>1</sup> Though Berryman's poetry at times might have sounded as though he were "abstracted" or "in a trance," he was nevertheless attempting to resolve the manner and method of poetry with what he knew about experience; he was attempting to write "properly" but "with passion and exactness."

In the first version of "Ars Poetica," which appeared along with "Lead Out the Weary Dancers," he considers how the symbol is turned

1. Mark Van Doren, The Autobiography of Mark Van Doren (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1958), p.211.

into words:

Contemporary timeless symbol  
 Of oblivion's pacts  
 Between man and man and mind and facts,  
 Carved anciently by nimble  
 Unknowing hands, there to stay moving  
 With no one approving  
 Or aware, until  
 The destined head moves down the hill  
 Into the hollow  
 And words follow. 1

Again in the poem "To an Artist Beginning Her Work," published about a year later, he advises the young artist:

Show but a part that will  
 Prepare another part,  
 The superstructure skill  
 Infers, the rumored heart  
 That never can be known  
 And must be counted on. 2

As in "Lead Out the Weary Dancers" the poet wants both a "contemporary" and a "timeless" presence embodied in his symbol. He understands and counts upon the double source of the symbol: the individual's past experience (the heart that "must be counted upon") and collective past experience (the symbol "carved anciently by nimble/Unknowing hands, there to stay moving"). Words, therefore, follow after the symbol; words may seem to create a symbol but actually symbol-making is that stage between experience and words.

Once again Yeats's comments on symbols are helpful: he said that the laws of art are "the hidden laws of the world" which "can alone bind the imagination"; he would "cast out of serious poetry" that kind of symbolism which is of the will alone and "seek out those wavering, meditative, organic rhythms, which are the embodiment of the imagination."<sup>3</sup> Though Berryman had not yet succeeded in embodying those "wavering, meditative, organic rhythms" in his poetry, he was asking important and

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1. John Berryman, "Ars Poetica," The Columbia Review, XVI (April 1935), 19.
  2. Berryman, "To an Artist Beginning Her Work," p.11.
  3. Yeats, "The Symbolism of Poetry," Essays and Introductions, p.163.

penetrating questions about his art; he was emulating great poets and gazing steadily at his subject so that he might seize it, make it visible, and add to the reader's "stock of available reality."

What was true of Berryman's student poetry in 1935-36 was almost as true of his first volume The Dispossessed in 1948. One reviewer summed up most opinions:

Something wistful and nostalgic is hiding behind a very sophisticated mask, as if the obligation to write aesthetically approved poetry were cynically at odds with what Mr. Berryman really wants to say. Some of the poems are deep, beautiful and go a long way; others are, you can't help feeling, deliberately foggy, without compensating magic. 1

I shall discuss The Dispossessed in more detail in a later chapter, but it is worth noting before turning to "Canto Amor" that Berryman's problem of writing "properly, with passion and exactness" still dogs him; the complex rhythms of his experience were not <sup>yet</sup> animating his poetry. "Canto Amor" drew very different reactions from reviewers. David Daiches said that "Mr. Berryman is less good with passion, and such a poem as 'Canto Amor' lacks the grave quiet precision of his best work"<sup>2</sup>; Gerard Previn Meyer, on the other hand, felt that "Canto Amor" is "a successful poem with its fine lines," and a poem which "rejoices, and we rejoice with the poet."<sup>3</sup> Though I find Daiches's criticism of "Canto Amor" self-contradictory (is "passion" to be expressed only in a "grave and quiet precision"?), the reader must judge for himself:

Dream in a dream the heavy soul somewhere  
struck suddenly & dark down to its knees.  
A griffin sighs off in the orphic air.

If (Unknown Majesty) I not confess  
praise for the wrack the rock the live sailor  
under the blue sea, -- yet I may You bless

always for her, in fear & joy for her  
whose gesture summons ever when I grieve  
me back and is my mage and minister.

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1. Thomas Ferril, "Some Recent Poetry," San Francisco Chronicle, December 5, 1948, p.19.
  2. David Daiches, "Wit, sense and Poetry," New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review, November 21, 1948, p.22.
  3. Gerard Previn Meyer, "Vigorous Swimmer in the Poetic Stream," Saturday Review of Literature, July 10, 1948, p.21.

-- Muses: whose worship I may never leave  
 but for this pensive woman now I dare,  
 teach me her praise! with her my praise receive. --

Three years already of the round world's war  
 had rolled by stone & disappointed eyes  
 when she and I came where we were made for.

Pale as a star lost in returning skies,  
 more beautiful than midnight stars more frail  
 she moved towards me like chords, a sacrifice;

entombed in body trembling through the veil  
 arm upon arm, learning our ancient wound,  
 we see our one soul heal, recovering pale.

Then priestly sanction, then the drop of sound.  
 Quickly part to the cavern ever warm  
 deep from the march, body to body bound,

descend (my soul) out of dismantling storm  
 into the darkness above the world is made.  
 ..Come back to the bright air. Love is multiform.

Heartmating hesitating unafraid  
 although incredulous, she seemed to fill  
 the lilac shadow with light wherein she played,

whom sorry childhood had made sit quite still  
 an orphan silence, unregarded sheen,  
 listening for any small soft note, not hopeful:

caricature: as once a maiden Queen,  
 flowering power comeliness kindness grace,  
 shattered her mirror, wept, would not be seen.

These pities moved. Also above her face  
 serious or flushed, swayed her fire-gold  
 not early hair, now moonless to unlace,

resistless flame, now in a sun more cold  
 great shells to whorl about each secret ear,  
 mysterious histories, white shores, unfold.

New musical! One the music that we hear,  
 this is the music which the masters make  
 out of their minds, profound solemn & clear.

And then the other music, in whose sake  
 all men perceive a gladness but we are drawn  
 less for that joy than utterly to take

our trial, naked in the music's vision  
 the flowing ceremony of trouble and light,  
 all Loves becoming, none to flag upon.

Such Mozart made, -- an ear so delicate  
 he fainted at a trumpet-call, a child  
 so delicate. So merciful that sight,

so stern, we follow rapt who ran a-wild.  
 Marriage is the second music, and thereof  
 we hear what we can bear, faithful & mild.

Therefore the streaming torches in the grove  
 though dark or bright, swiftly & now more near  
 cherish a festival of anxious love.

Dance for this music, Mistress to music dear,  
 more, that storm worries the disordered wood  
 grieving the midnight of my thirtieth year

and only the trial of our music should  
 still this irresolute air, only your voice  
 spelling the tempest may compel our good:

Sigh then beyond my song: whirl & rejoice!

Berryman's progress from "Lead Out the Weary Dancers" to "Canto Amor" is immediately apparent; he now combines scope with a sureness of language and rhythm which convey more of the concrete immediacy of his subject. There is a less obvious progress as well; we find a quite different, more vital <sup>and personal</sup> way of relating the symbol to experience. In "Canto Amor" Berryman tries a traditional form in the terza rima; we still hear some of the hesitating angularity of style, but now the angularity seems functional and his control allows a few moments of poise. When Dudley Fitts reviewed The Dispossessed he singled out "Canto Amor" and expressed his dislike of the terza rima, a form, he said, "so encrusted with jewelry that it barely moves."<sup>1</sup> Robert Lowell, about sixteen years later, reacted very differently: "In 'Canto Amor,' one of his most eloquent and high-flown poems, he tried [to feel out new styles and methods], like Rosetti and Pound, but with a difference, to adapt the speculative stile nuovo of Dante's shorter poems."<sup>2</sup> Lowell then quotes several lines from "Canto Amor" and comments:

The power of these lines comes from the difficulty of the task, the brave labor to give music and nobility to a bare archaic style, full of elbows, quaintness and stops. If Berryman's later work seems idiosyncratic one should remember that he had the humility and stamina to pass all the hardest standard tests. 3

1. Dudley Fitts, "Deep in the Unfriendly City," New York Times Book Review, June 20, 1948, p.4.
2. Robert Lowell, "The Poetry of John Berryman," New York Review of Books, II (May 28, 1964), 3.
3. Ibid.

In modern American poetry we have been dubious of the possibility of using traditional forms successfully, but surely traditional forms can be remade and heard in a different way, as in Eliot's use of a kind of mock terza rima in "Little Gidding" (the passage based on the Brunetto ~~Latine~~ Canto of the Inferno). Berryman might not have been wholly successful in remaking the terza rima, but nevertheless, an originality breaks through. There is an argument for the order and formality of the form; form in this case is consonant with the speaker's attitude towards his subject and his experience; the hooking rhyme scheme (aba, bcb, cdc, etc.) affirms the harmony of the marriage he praises. But this is not to say that disharmony is not possible in their marriage: no two lines ever settle into a regular iambic, and the rhymes are often discordant (even the first stanza does not hook surely into the second stanza -- "knees, confess, bless," and the very word "love" we would expect to rhyme reveals a disharmony -- "thereof, grove, love," though, admittedly, "love" has very few rhymes -- paradoxically, this is the point). So "Canto Amor" is not as "encrusted" as Fitts would have us believe. If there is "old jewelry" it is not Dante's, but rather, the animation of Hopkins's "sprung rhythm" which we hear from the opening lines:

Dream in a dream the heavy soul somewhere  
struck suddenly & dark down to its knees.

Sounds and repetition are packed into a form; consonance and dissonance coalesce with meaning and animate feeling.

There is less ambiguity of the poet's apostrophes than in "Lead Out the Weary Dancers." But we find a different difficulty, that of the surprising inversion as at the end of the following tercet:

If (Unknown Majesty) I not confess  
 praise for the wrack the rock the live sailor  
 under the sea, -- yet may I You bless....

This kind of inversion, which would be twisted even more as Berryman developed, was to become his hallmark, a style which attempts to create the "animating presence in poetry," a style which "not only expresses the matter in hand/ but adds to the stock of available reality" (L. & F., p.27). The "matter in hand" here is an address by a speaker, like one of Hardy's, who is not sure that the God he addresses is there. His doubt is underscored, though obscurely in meaning, with the harshness of "the wrack the rock," and his sense of urgency is created by leaving out commas. Disrupted syntax ("yet I may You bless") emphasizes "You." The inversion of "You" is both revealing and functional: it reveals the speaker's desire to believe in "You" (which is now placed so as to pick up and recall "yet"), and it functions to cause the reader to readjust to what Robert Lowell called a "disrupted and mended syntax."<sup>1</sup> The syntax is disrupted and the reader through force of habit mends it; the result is a kind of "animating presence" which the reader himself has created. But Berryman's fullest control of the style was to come after "Canto Amor"; he was still given to a turgid line; as Lowell says, "at first he wrote with great brio bristles of clauses, all breaks with little to break off from."<sup>2</sup> And we find those "brio bristles of clauses" in "Canto Amor" a little over half way through:

Heartmating hesitating unafraid  
 although incredulous, she seemed to fill  
 the lilac shadow with light wherein she played,

whom sorry childhood had made sit quite still  
 an orphan silence, unregarded sheen,  
 listening for any small soft note, not hopeful:

caricature: as once a maiden Queen,  
 flowering power comeliness kindness grace,  
 shattered her mirror, wept, would not be seen.

This has its own graces, but nevertheless gives a rather congested effect; in the last stanza there is too much asyndeton and an effect of hurrying.

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1. Lowell, "For John Berryman," p.3.
  2. Ibid.

But elsewhere there is much clarity and energy.

Though Dudley Fitts feels that "Canto Amor" is "an odd title,"<sup>1</sup> it clearly tells us that his subject is love and that he will "sing" ("canto" in Spanish means "I sing") of "love." The title not only emphasizes the poet's timeless theme (a deep amor not amour), but also reveals how we should regard its method. Fitts might have been puzzling over a single short poem being called a "canto" when actually a canto is a major division of a long poem. But the title may be seen as beginning the poem where it ends, beyond the song; in other words, the speaker can express only part of the love between himself and his wife; theirs is a long complex relationship beyond the poem ("sigh then beyond my song"), and therefore, this poem about their love is only one "canto" in a more complex and continuing series of "cantos." Within this single "canto" are shorter "cantos" or parts, five in all, so that the stanza-parts are arranged as follows: 1-4, 5-9, 10-14, 15-19, and 20-22 to which the concluding line-stanza should be added. The first part (1-4) sets the tone and suggests that in the "canto" which will follow we may expect something deeply felt and perceived ("dream in a dream"). Then the poet gives a sort of classical invocation to "God" and the muses, who are not so much invoked in the classical manner as dismissed for the praise of his wife:

-- Muses: whose worship I may never leave  
but for this pensive woman, now I dare,  
teach me her praise! with her my praise receive. --

The second part (5-9) shifts from the present time to the past when he and his wife, in fulfilling their destiny, met three years after the beginning of World War II. She was "beautiful" and "frail" and she brought harmony ("chords"), but only through her life-giving "sacrifice" to their union. Their union overcame "their ancient wound" (the Fall), and they saw their "one soul heal, recovering pale." After their

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1. Fitts, "Deep in the Unfriendly City," p.4.

marriage ("priestly sanction") there followed a peace in which they were "body to body bound"; the poet's "soul" descended "out of the dismantling storm/into the darkness where the world is made." "Love is multiform" and has "multiformed" them into a complex harmony. In the third part (10-14), the poet continues to praise his wife; he says that through their union she seemed to protect them from death ("she seemed to fill/the lilac shadow with light"). Because of her, "mysterious histories, white shores, unfold" to them both. By the end of the third part the poet begins to shift back to the present time and the fourth part (15-19) begins in the present: we have now "New musics!" and the poet still emphasizes their continuing, harmonious union. But, he says, their marriage union is a complex harmony, not like the simple music "which the masters make/ out of their minds," but a complex music of feeling and mind, "the flowing ceremony of trouble and light,/all Loves becoming...." Their complex music is not merely the "mind within the eyes" as in "Lead Out the Weary Dancers," but a "music's vision," "such as Mozart made," a music so compelling, a music "so merciful" and "so stern, we follow rapt who ran a-wild." (There is an irony in that Mozart composed music easily and fluidly, while their "marriage music" does not come so easily). Their marriage music is "so delicate" and deep that they will be able to "hear" only what they can "bear, faithful & mild." Finally, the last part (20-22 and the last line-stanza) at first may seem like a logical conclusion, but it is less a tidying-up than it is a suggestive opening-out of a continuing harmony. We anticipate the last turn of the whole "canto" with "therefore" and we arrive at the conclusion we have anticipated: "cherish a festival of anxious love." But the poem ends with an injunction that the dance continue, their "flowing ceremony of trouble and light" described in the preceding part. His "Mistress," an ambiguous epithet Berryman would return to in another "union" with Mistress Bradstreet, is

the female head of their household; she is a teacher and a lover -- but married in this case. Only the ceremony of their marriage dance will still the "irresolute air"; only her voice will spell the tempest and compel their good. The "canto" ends with a comment on the nature of their living experience as it relates to the song praising it: "Sigh then beyond my song: whirl & rejoice!" Their experience is frozen for the moment into a form but their experience will continue beyond the song. No "final sigh" is stifled as in the statue-dancers of "Lead Out the Weary Dancers"; theirs is a living, ever-moving, and continuing dance.

We find a very different use of the dancer image in "Canto Amor" than in "Lead Out the Weary Dancers." In the earlier poem the dancers are observed at a distance as aesthetic objects; in this later poem the poet's eye is upon the dance as well as the dancers, and the dance is an expression of their past, present, and future marriage. The poet and his wife's dance is both "contemporary" and "timeless," that kind of symbol that the youthful Berryman had desired, but had not quite succeeded in incorporating into his poetry. The dancer symbol works to suggest immediate experience and gathers about it a long ancestral feeling of the marriage ceremony. We have a "superstructure skill" which "infers the rumored heart," the heart that can "never be known/And must be counted on."<sup>1</sup> And finally, the dance symbol is, as Yeats said of the successful symbol, a part of "the wavering, meditative, organic rhythms which are the embodiment of the imagination."<sup>2</sup> The marriage dance is expressive, rather than the expression itself, <sup>of</sup> what Walter Pater in a different context called "the condition of music." The marriage dance expresses a "condition," a state of being, a "difficult

1. Berryman, "To an Artist Beginning Her Work," p.11.

2. Yeats, "The Symbolism of Poetry," Essays and Introductions, p.163.

rhythm" in which the poet senses and attempts to express his feeling which surges outward but a condition which suggests enveloping harmony. The poet and his wife are priest and priestess to their own ceremony; they offer sacrifice and enter into a communion which is their marriage.

In 1936, a year after "Lead Out the Weary Dancers" was published, Berryman wrote an essay-review of Yeats's Collected Plays. Though he reviewed the whole collection, he considered in some detail Yeats's six "dance plays." Berryman's approach was to recall the importance of ritual to Yeats which should be held in mind as we read or see Yeats's plays. Berryman's definition of ritual as it relates to art is particularly revealing when we consider the development of his own poetry. He took

"ritual" to signify a code or form of ceremonies, the formal character imposed on any experience as it is given objective existence by the imagination working in craft; the experience attains independent aesthetic vitality precisely through and by its limitation. 1

This idea of the fused relation between ritual and art and experience would remain an important principle throughout Berryman's criticism and poetry. In his biography of Stephen Crane (1950), he compared Crane's poetry with a primitive ritual in which the savage has a frightening dream and goes to the medicine man for an explanation. The medicine man shrewdly appeals to the hearer's universal sense of rhythm; "interpretation enters the chanting, symbols are developed and connected, the gods are invoked, poetry booms."<sup>2</sup> This <sup>is</sup> to speak of poetry in terms of essences and energies, as Yeats did. Yeats hoped to squeeze man's past and his present individual experience into a ball of art, and this solid ball was to be held together by symbols which would set up reverberations of past and present experience in the reader or hearer. Yeats's incantory style in turn complemented the symbolic essences, a style where the sentences, as Denis Donoghue says,

1. John Berryman, "The Ritual of W.B. Yeats," The Columbia Review XVII (May-June, 1936), 29.
2. John Berryman, Stephen Crane (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1950), p.273.

"are more readily understandable if we take them as rituals, prescriptions, interdictions, than secular utterances."<sup>1</sup> All of these explanations and descriptions go some distance towards understanding a poem like "Canto Amor": the experience of the poet is signified "in a code or form of ceremonies"; we have the "formal character" of terza rima "imposed" upon the "experience as it is given objective existence by the imagination working in a craft" so that "the experience attains independent aesthetic vitality precisely through and by its limitation"; we have interpretation entering the chanting as "symbols are developed and connected" and the "gods are invoked"; and we have at times an incantatory style:

Dance for this music, Mistress to music dear,  
more, that storm worries the disordered wood  
grieving the midnight of my thirtieth year

and only the trial of our music should  
still this irresolute air, only in your voice  
spelling the tempest may compel our good:

Sigh then beyond my song: whirl & rejoice!

As I have suggested, "Canto Amor" is not all ritualistic in style or method: Berryman's "disrupted and mended syntax"<sup>2</sup> depends upon the reader's participation rather than his being mesmerized, and the way he uses the dance symbol is calculated to ask the reader to remember that the poet's experience is both in the poem and outside the poem. The whole purpose of the poem as it moves from part to part is to give a sense of movement from an invocation of the muse to a contemplation of experience to a transformation of the contemplation back into experience.

Neither Yeats's style nor his symbols call upon such subjectivity; his dilemma was either to portray experience or contemplate experience, and he inclined towards the latter. In one sense all poetry is a contemplation of experience, but there is that kind of poetry which

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1. Denis Donoghue, Yeats (London: Fontana/Collins, 1971), p.73.
  2. Lowell, "For John Berryman," p.3.

leans towards enacting the poet's own experience and invites the reader to participate in the experience. The more Yeats used symbols the further he drifted away from the experience. Frank Kermode says, for example, that when Yeats was ill it "might have changed his character but not his poems," and he cites Yeats's diary entry in 1930 as evidence:

My character is so little myself that all my life it has thwarted me. It has affected my poems, my true self, no more than the character of a dancer affects the movements of a dance. 1

Berryman however aimed at nothing less than "the reformation of the poet, as prayer does," and this sense of the poet's experience is evident even in so formal a poem as "Canto Amor." The poet stands in reciprocity to his poem; his experience is in the poem and outside the poem. Yeats recognized this truth of the nature of experience as it relates to art, but his poems were more an attempt to embody experience and as a result they give a sense of the experience being in the poem alone and set at a distance from the poet himself. He would never say, though he might imply, that the dance is beyond the poem but that the dance is the poem itself; the poem alone proclaims the dance:

I, proclaiming that there is  
Among birds or beasts or men  
One that is perfect or at peace,  
Danced on Cruachan's windy plain,  
Upon Cro-Patrick sang aloud;  
All that could run or leap or swim  
Whether in wood, water or cloud,  
Acclaiming, proclaiming, declaiming Him. 2

Yeats of course came to stress passion as the source of poetry, and so would Berryman, but the difference between the two is that Berryman would emphasize passion beyond the poem and he would make the connection between the poet and the poem clearer; his "mask" was slowly removed. As we shall see again when we come to Keats's notion of the "chameleon

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1. Frank Kermode, Romantic Image (New York: Vintage Books, 1957), p.76.
  2. Yeats, "The Dancer at Cruachan and Cro-Patrick" The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1956), p.263.

poet" (the poet being both in the poem and outside the poem), the poet's experience relates to and fuses with someone outside the poem.

Though Yeats was Berryman's avowed master, his real kinship is with the English Romantic poets. (We should allow that Yeats called himself one of the "last romantics," but he has more in common with Blake and with the French Symbolists, later with Donne and the Metaphysicals, and in the end with certain Anglo-Irish Augustan poets like Swift and Goldsmith.) This kinship will be discussed in more detail, but I cite briefly several examples from "Canto Amor." Berryman had a special feeling for music, though he himself was not a musician ("The only thing I regret more than having no sister... is that I have no gift myself for music"<sup>1</sup>). And he felt a deep kinship with musicians, as his poetry reflects. He responded to what Coleridge called the "mighty hot magic" of music, and wished to write poetry that approached the immediacy of music. Among Berryman's favorite composers were Mozart and Beethoven. Beethoven's enigmatic and complex mixture of tumult and serenity especially moved him, but in "Canto Amor" he calls up the delicate and complex music such as Mozart made. Coleridge wrote of Mozart and Beethoven as his kin as well, and, as Berryman seemed to feel, Coleridge found that their music and their composition of music expressed his own experience better than words. Here he compares his own experience of creating a poem with their experience of creating music:

Mozart and Beethoven were in a spirit analogous to mine when I at once waiting for, watching, organically constructing and inwardly constructed by, the Ideas, the living Truths, that may be re-excited but cannot be expressed by Words, the Transcendents that give Objectivity to all Objects, the Form to all Images, yet are themselves untranslatable into any Image, unrepresentable by any particular Object.... 2

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1. Howard, "Whisky and Ink, Whisky and Ink," p.76.
  2. Cited by Kermode, Romantic Image, p.66.

With Coleridge's idea that the act of composing music is that it is organically made and not an artefact of the mind, we can see that when Berryman is attempting to express the complexities such as Mozart made in his music, he is suggesting that the living complexity of the "marriage music" is beyond expression. Now this connection with Coleridge does not make Berryman a Romantic; what does help to place him with the Romantics is his attempt to express the inexpressible "living Truths" which are "untranslatable into any Image." These truths, which come out of felt experience, are outside the poem and always beyond the possibility of expression even in images or symbols which appeal to our senses. Music and the dance are images or dynamic symbols, but because of their immediate appeal to our senses are themselves expressive, though not definite expressions, of the inexpressible. Berryman was caught in the same dilemma of resolving symbol and experience as Yeats. John Bayley has said that Yeats's great difficulty was "how to retain 'the indefiniteness of music' in addition to meaning something"<sup>1</sup>; but Berryman wanted more than the indefiniteness of music and meaning in his symbols; he was attempting nothing less than making experience a living presence. It is of course an impossible notion and while he realized that it was, nevertheless, he seemed to strive after breaking down the limitations of language. It is as though he would break through the words and symbols to "seize" and to "make visible" experience itself. Again Coleridge is enlightening on the expressive and "translucent" symbol Berryman wanted:

... a symbol... is characterized by a translucence of the special in the individual, or of the general in the special, or of the universal in the general; above all by the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal. It always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides as itself a living part in that unity of which it is representative. 2

The kind of expressive symbol Berryman attempts in "Canto Amor" is not merely, as he had advised an artist beginning her work twelve years before,

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1. Bayley, The Romantic Survival, p.118.
  2. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Complete Works, I, ed. W.G.T. Shedd (New York, 1853-54), pp.437-38.

a "part that will/Prepare another part" which implies "the rumored heart,"<sup>1</sup> but rather, a symbol which "partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible." The success or failure of an expressive symbol not only depends upon the sensitivity and perceptiveness of the reader, but also upon the poet's ability to find the translucent "contemporary" and "timeless" symbol which brings the reader into the experience that is in the poem and that is outside the poem. The symbols in a poem, in short, as Archibald MacLeish said of the whole poem, "should not mean but be."

It is obvious that the symbol will not instantaneously dissolve into most readers' experience. Music and the dance, for example, will register differently in the minds and experiences of different readers. The poet may in part overcome these limitations of language and perception by enacting the symbol, that is, by bringing the symbol into a coalescence of rhythm, feeling and meaning. The expressive movements of the dance and the power of music may never be fully enacted or played in words, but through a selective emphasis the poet may suggest the rise and fall of the dancer's feet and in effect imaginatively project the experience. Winifred Nowotny, in describing Eliot's use of the dancer in Eliot's "East Coker," makes precisely this point:

The poet sets himself to blur the distinction between the circling of the dance and the rising and falling of the dancer's feet, insisting by all means at his disposal that these two movements are inextricable from one another and that each is the same as something further and that all the movements executed in the poem evince the circular pattern, 'In my end is my beginning... In my beginning is my end' and that this ratifies the vision that all experience and all history point to God, and that the dance is the exemplar of the pattern that runs through the whole life. What makes it possible for the dance to act as the centre of widening circles of meaning is that the poet has used pattern and ambiguity to overcome the difficulties which a logical statement of such a point of view would present. In the dance passage it becomes particularly clear that the poet in his writing can make use of the difference (which, in reading, we do not consider) between a real object and a merely verbal object.... In short, Eliot's success with this symbol is possible because the dance in the poem is a verbal objective

1. Berryman, "To An Artist Beginning Her Work," p.11.

selectively treated -- not an object in the world outside the poem or in our perception of that world, nor even in what we might think of as a sort of mental register of word meanings in which we turn up the <sup>word</sup>'dance'. 1

In "Canto Amor" Berryman manages something nearly like this description of Eliot's symbol of the dancer. Berryman tries to overcome the difficulties of trying to express what a logical statement will not allow. The last two stanzas have an unbroken syntactical connection which draws us into the phrases which rise and fall as movements ("Dance for this music, Mistress to music dear,/more," etc.) and then move into wider circles:

and only the trial of our music should  
still this irresolute air, only your voice  
spelling the tempest may compel our good:

Sigh then beyond my song: whirl & rejoice!

Here Berryman "makes us think" as Nowotny says of this kind of dynamic symbolism, "we see something important and meaningful 'in' his symbols, without our noticing that it was he who put that something into the setting of the symbol and into the language by which it is presented,"<sup>2</sup> a language which is "poised between the figurative and the real."<sup>3</sup>

So in a poem like "Canto Amor" Berryman is beginning to "seize" his subject and to "make it visible"; he offers the reader the "language of experience" (not Wordsworth's language of "men speaking to men") as he said he wanted to do in 1940. But it was not until The Dream Songs that Berryman fully realized the vitality in poetry he sought. The context of dreams which are spread over a period of eleven years is all important, for his "disrupted and mended syntax" becomes functional and convincing and his symbols are dynamically inter-related so that he finally orchestrates the "difficult rhythms" of a personality. The real benefit of using dreams is that disrupted syntax and dynamic symbol seem to flow out of the experience as it happens or is reenacted. I

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1. Winifred Nowotny, The Language Poets Use (London: The Athlone Press, 1965), pp.178-79.
  2. Ibid., p.179.
  3. Ibid., p.184.

say "seems" because all of the Songs are reflections upon the past, but because of the intensity and condensing nature of dreams the experience seems in effect to be relived. We shall see just how Henry's "experience" in dreams comes to life in a later chapter, but for the moment let us continue with a Song which will relate to the poems I have discussed which will serve to illustrate another great contraction in Berryman's spasmodic career.

Near the end of The Dream Songs the following "dancer" Dream Song begins to conclude Henry's eleven year journey (Berryman said that this dancer Song was one of the three concluding poems<sup>1</sup>):

At Henry's hier let some thing fall out well:  
enter there none who somewhat has to sell,  
the music ancient & gradual,  
the voices solemn but the grief subdued,  
no hairy jokes but everybody's mood  
subdued, subdued,

until the Dancer comes, in a short short dress  
hair black & long & loose, dark dark glasses,  
uptilted face,  
pallor & strangeness, the music changes  
to 'Give!' & 'Ow!' and how! the music changes,  
she kicks a backward limb

on tiptoe, pirouettes, & she is free  
to the knocking music, sails, dips, & suddenly  
returns to the terrible gay  
occasion hopeless & mad, she weaves, it's hell,  
she flings to her head a leg, bobs, all is well,  
she dances Henry away.

(The D.S. VII, 382)

The distinct differences of style and form that a comparison of "Lead Out the Weary Dancers" and "Canto Amor"<sup>suggested</sup> are no less apparent in comparing them with Dream Song 382. I.A. Richards has said that "there can be little doubt that historically [metre]... has been closely associated with dancing and that the connections of the two still hold."<sup>2</sup> The sense of slow and quick movement, the variations within the slowness and the "sudden bursts and accelerations"<sup>3</sup> Michael Dennis Browne finally

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1. Martin Berg, "An Interview with John Berryman," The Minnesota Daily, January 20, 1971, p.10.
  2. I.A. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1926), p.111.
  3. Browne, "Henry Fermenting: Debts to the Dream Songs," p.76.

heard in The Dream Songs are the very stuff of this Song, the connection between dance and meter still holds. Where rhythm in "Canto Amor" coalesces with meaning and feeling only at certain points, rhythm here is the meaning; the symbol is not as important as the rhythmic means by which it comes to life. The opening line does not indicate the intensity which will follow; an almost casual prose rhythm, "At Henry's bier let something fall out well," eases the reader into the "dance." Then the second line tightens, the diction and syntax are disrupted, "Enter there none who somewhat has to sell." The syntax is not disrupted enough to fragment meaning entirely, but syntax is varied just enough to emphasize "none" (rather than "none let there enter there"). Those who "sell" something so unspecified and indeterminate as "somewhat" are not allowed at Henry's bier. The heavy, somber mood at Henry's bier is drawn out in slow rhythms and sonorous sound:

the music ancient & gradual,  
the voices solemn but the grief subdued,  
no hairy jokes but everybody's mood  
subdued, subdued....

At first it might seem that "ancient music" is an attempt to conjure up music simply by naming, but the "timeless" and "contemporary" symbols of music are subtly and selectively played out at Henry's bier ("bier" of course is calculated to conjure up an association of ancient burial rites, like those in Odysseus' time -- Odysseus is mentioned in the following Song 383). The shifted syntax slows the somber pace as adjectives follow nouns -- "music ancient & gradual," "voices solemn," and "grief subdued" -- and meaning and feeling hover in the sonorous repeated rhymes "subdued," "mood/subdued, subdued." Then the second stanza bursts and accelerates the music; monosyllabic words, repetition, short vowels, clustered consonants, and no commas to break the rush, all move rapidly with the Dancer "in a short short dress." We were not able to visualize the dancer in "Lead Out the Weary Dancer," but here a paced lingering in consonant "l's" hold together a sensuous image:

"hair black & long & loose." And then the rhythm changes to a quick pace to emphasize the mysterious nature of the figure in "dark dark glasses." The shifts in rhythm from rapid to slow anticipate the movements of the dancer; the "music changes/to 'Give!' & 'Ow!'" and then the colloquial and comic counterpoint, "and how!", at least one "hairy joke." The "music changes" again and leads into the third stanza as the dancer "kicks a backward limb," she slows "on tiptoe" and she "pirouettes"; then moves almost breathlessly to "the knocking music" as she "sails, dips" and she "flings to her head a leg, bobs" but "all is well" as "she dances Henry away."

Though the form is formal in that it follows the stanzaic and accentual pattern of practically all of the other Dream Songs, we find a fluidity and sureness here that are absent in "Lead Out the Weary Dancers" and only half realized in "Canto Amor." In The Dream Songs Berryman is no less concerned with craft, "I perfect my metres/until no mosquito can get through" (The D.S. VII, 297), but where before he had attempted to pour new expression into old forms, in The Dream Songs he has made "new forms in which ancient thought appears" (The D.S. VII, 282); we witness to his "scrubbing the multiverse with dazzled thought" (The D.S. VI, 177).

As I have noted, Berryman saw the stanzaic structure of each of The Dream Songs as a sort of "three part sonnet," but the form is more flexible than that comparison indicates. The meter, which is accentual and seems to owe something to Hopkins's "sprung rhythm," determines each stanza's structure, the accents generally following a 553553 pattern. The regularity of the short third and sixth lines make the stanza seem like a static symmetry but in practice they serve as spring boards into the next two long lines as often as they bring the long lines around into a short summary. The rhyme scheme is even more flexible than the accentual meter: very few Songs have exactly the same rhyme

scheme; there is free use of near rhymes, and consonantal and assonantal rhyme, or, rhyme might break down altogether. Berryman acknowledged that "rime is a powerful tool" and said that in The Dream Songs "the notion is to preserve an impression of rime over the three stanzas but without any actual rime at all, even internal rime."<sup>1</sup> Of course actually there is rhyme; what Berryman seems to mean is that the rhyme scheme varies for each Song: "... in my Songs the rime business is incidental, and it all depends on how things go."<sup>2</sup> How things did go in many Songs seem considered and functional, and the "dancer" Dream Song is a good example. In the following schematic pattern, the rhymes seem to stack up at first and suspend the subject; then the rhyme breaks down and opens out, but finally, rhyme takes hold again and rounds out the whole Song. (I have italicized the near rhymes):

a	c	f
a	c	f
<u>a</u>	<u>c</u>	<u>f</u>
b	d	a
b	d	a
b	e	g

The different slow-quick movements of the rhythms seem to have dictated the rhyme scheme. In the first stanza the rhythm and mood are slow and regular and so are the rhymes. In the second stanza the dancer comes; at first the description of the dancer suspends the steady mood of the first stanza and rhyme continues to complement the mood (cc). But the off rhymes begin to move, as it were, with the frantic knocking movements of the dancer, until finally the rhyme breaks down altogether (dde, and "e" does not rhyme). In the last stanza the changing movements of the dancer are again complemented by rhyme but in this case the bobbing weaving movements of the dancer are held in a harmony by the regular rhyme. The union of Henry and the Dancer is complete and held in poise that not only rounds out the stanza but also the whole poem (gaag) and the

1. Sisson, "My Whiskers Fly: An Interview with John Berryman," p.15.

2. Ibid.

rhymes recall the beginning of the poem ("well" in fact is repeated, and emphasizes that it is "well" that Henry wants to be, but it is "hell" trying to be "well"). Henry not so much learns something as he becomes.

Without paying full attention to the meaning of Dream Song 382 the form and rhyme of the Song are accomplishments in themselves. But if we are to attempt to consider the rich meaning of this Song we must consider it in the light of the previous Songs, remembering that The Dream Songs is one whole poem and that the association of dreams is a ruling principle. In the first line, for example, "let some thing fall out well" echoes the very first Dream Song "nothing fell out as it might or ought," and it reveals the progress Henry has made in overcoming his petulant, "huffy" attitude; now he is "subdued" and his attitude is more mature. But rather than give a line by line exegesis of the Song, I shall concentrate more on the Dancer as I have in "Lead Out the Weary Dancers" and "Canto Amor." The dance and the dancer recur enough in Henry's dreams to be expressive of a general desire for universal and individual harmony and wholeness. He senses a harmony about him, but he cannot quite assimilate it into his own experience; "good Spring/ returns with a dance and a sigh" (The D.S. II, 27), but Henry himself is "at odds with de world & its god" (The D.S. I, 5). His great need is to somehow merge with and feel a part of the universal whole: Dante and Rimbaud could rely on a whole, "definite universe" (The D.S. VII, 348); but Henry cannot; he senses that he is part of a seasonal dance but all else about him seems to batter so much that the dance of the seasons is not sufficient harmony. He is more like Odysseus tied to the mast listening to the Sirens:

Dance in the gunwales to what they cannot hear  
my lorn men. I bear every piece of it.

(The D.S. VI, 243)

The dance Henry desires most is with a woman through whom and with whom, he hopes, a union will bring some harmony to his fragmented life. The obvious expression of this union is sexual and immature:

Le's do a hoedown gal,  
one blue, one shuffle,  
if them is all you seem to réquire.

(The D.S. I, 2)

But such a union "requires" more than a "hoedown"; if a woman is a "gal" she becomes femme fatale

Come & dance, Housman's hopeless heroine  
bereft of all: I take you in me arms  
burnt cork....

(The D.S. VI, 205)

If his dance, his "marriage music" as in "Canto Amor," is to mean something, if Henry is to know a lasting harmony, then his commitment to his wife must be total. He makes the commitment and the union produces a child; "her blood" combines with Henry's to produce a "little thing":

It all went better, mingling,  
and Little sprang out.  
The parking-lot tilted & made dance,  
ditching Jesuits. The sun gave it a glance  
and went about & about.

(The D.S. VI, 186)

Henry, his wife, and their child make a harmonious dance and their harmony seems to merge with a wider harmony as the sun gives them a glance and goes "about & about."

But the dance in Henry's dreams suggests more than a marriage dance. He advises young academics, who are gathered at a Modern Language Association convention at Christmas, to forget their footnotes and "dance around Mary" (The D.S. II, 35) ("Mary" is ambiguous, however, because the wife of one of the professors at the convention is named Mary.) But the dance with Mary is a passing reference; Henry is far more concerned about his dance of death. The chill of death causes him to dance "in his snow/waking, perspiring" (The D.S. V, 141); but he hopes to be reborn.

out of his death ritual: "Henry springs youthfully/in his six-by-two like a dancer" (The D.S. VI, 164). Similes and symbols of the dancer become a reality by the end of The Dream Songs, and all of the meanings of the dancer fold into the final dancer Song; the dancer, Henry, and the dance become one. When the Dancer "dances Henry away," the symbol of the Dancer has been experienced in such a way as to suggest a statement of what his experience and his art have done for him; in effect, when the Dancer dances Henry away, he is saying, "I create my art and my art creates me." The "pallor & strangeness" of the Dancer's dead face is the paradoxical face that Pater and Yeats used as representing "what is most 'vital' in art,"<sup>1</sup> the reconciling physical presence of life in death and death in life. But Berryman's dancer not only turns in her narrow circle; she is not only visualized as a union between body and mind, but she also reaches out to embrace the man who dreams of her. She at once casts her deadly spell like Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" and gives new life; there is no reason to know, in Yeats's phrase, "the dancer from the dance"; we are the dance and the paradoxical dancer's rhythms are within us, the "rhythmic/phonic 'deep structures' of experience," as Christopher Middleton says. Hart Crane, a poet whose poetry Berryman would have known well, compresses the whole notion into several lines:

... the padded foot  
 Within, --I heard it; 'til its rhythm drew  
 --Siphoned the black pool from the heart's hot root! 2

Having been drawn to "the heart's hot root" the Muse is invoked, and when she comes she inspires both dread and joy. Robert Graves is another poet whom Berryman admired greatly -- "one of the shrewdest, craziest, and most neglected students of poetry."<sup>3</sup> Graves has described the invocation

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1. Kernode, Romantic Image, p.65.
  2. Hart Crane, The Complete Poems and Selected Letters and Prose of Hart Crane, ed. Brom Weber (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), p.72.
  3. John Berryman, Stephen Crane (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1950), p.273.

of the Muse as a religious invocation and suggests that she would look something like Henry's Dancer: "The function of poetry is religious invocation of the Muse; its use is the experience of mixed exaltation and horror that her presence excites."<sup>1</sup> "Originally," Graves says later in The White Goddess, "the poet was the leader of a totem-society of religious dancers."<sup>2</sup> Henry in his dreams is compelled to call up the complex rhythms of "ancient longings" (The D.S. VI, 271); his ancient longings as a poet compel him to follow the terrifying gaiety of the dance; the Dancer comes in a music "ancient & gradual" (The D.S. VII, 382). Now he has been "suffered" to see the symbol he knows.

The <sup>fun</sup>ction of poetry as "religious invocation" informs Berryman's posthumous volume Delusions, Etc. as well. One of the epigraphs indicates once again that Berryman still believed in poetry's aiming at "the reformation of the poet, as prayer does": "On parle toujours de 'l'art religieux.' L'art est religieux." But now God is at the center of Berryman's poetry; whereas before the Muse was the high priestess of his monastery and he addressed God as an "Unknown Majesty." Like Christopher Smart, who came to devote all of his energy to writing religious poetry, Berryman came to be more of a religious poet, or, more accurately a poet who wrote about God and addressed God. He did not pray in public with Smart's fervor nor was he committed to a madhouse, but the parallels between them are illuminating. Smart took very literally the injunction to "pray without ceasing" and he increasingly was given to praying at any time so that finally he was committed. Mrs. Thrale, who very likely relies upon Dr. Johnson's reports, suggests an interesting view of Smart's religious "madness":

While Kit Smart thought it his duty to pray in Secret, no living creature knew how mad he was; but as soon as the Idea struck him that every time he thought of praying, Resistance against that

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1. Robert Graves, The White Goddess (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1961), p.14.
  2. Ibid., p.422.

divine Impulse (as he thought it) was a Crime: he knelt down in the Streets & Assembly Rooms, and wherever he was when the thought crossed his mind -- and this indecorous conduct obliged his Frier is to place him in a Confinement whence many mad as he remain excluded, only because their Delusion is not known. 1

"Madness" and its related manifestation "delusion," of course hover about Delusions, Etc. Like Mrs. Thrale's implication that "much madness is divinest sense" Berryman was clearly meaning to imply the same divine madness for his volume; another of his epigraphs tells us so from the outset:

And indeed if Eugene Irténev was mentally deranged everyone is in the same case; the most mentally deranged people are certainly those who see in others indications of insanity they do not notice in themselves.

(D.E., p.vii)

But unlike Smart's "delusion," Berryman was concerned with the "delusion" that the existence of God is scientifically provable: "I don't think," he says of the idea of God's universal presence, "there's a molecular chance of that." Nevertheless, after having acknowledged this impossibility, he still believes that the delusion is worthwhile:

Thank heavens  
Millions agree with me, or mostly do,  
and have done ages of our human time,  
among whom were & still are some very sharp cookies.  
I don't exactly feel missionary about it,  
though it's very true I wonder if I should.  
I regard the boys who don't buy this as deluded.  
Of course they regard me no doubt as deluded.  
Okay with me!

(D.E., p.68)

More pertinent to my discussion here is the parallel between Smart's great poem "Song to David" and Berryman's "King David Dances"<sup>2</sup> which is the final poem of Delusions, Etc. and ends the volume with the

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1. Cited by Christopher Devlin, Poor Kit Smart (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1961), p.80.
  2. In his "Note" to The Dispossessed (p.vii), Berryman used a line from Smart's "Song to David" in one of his poems: "'Sweet when the last arrive' in 'A Winter-Piece to a Friend Away' is from the great mad poem of Smart," Berryman informs us.

suggestion of a cosmic dance. It would serve no purpose to compare the two poems: Smart's song is much longer and more ambitious than Berryman's short lyric. What is striking is that both poets seemed to feel a great kinship with King David. To Smart, King David was a personification of the greatest religious poet; Berryman, on the other hand, chose to emphasize the hell in King David's life and his dance before the Lord. Both poets probably felt a kinship with David for similar reasons. Smart's feeling towards David is best summarized in his emblazoned final line "DETERMIN'D, DAR'D, and DONE" and Berryman would have been drawn to that assurance as well. But other of David's virtues would have appealed to Berryman more: those of his terrible honesty and his will to struggle ever onwards through catastrophic events, any one of which would have destroyed a lesser man. What better summary of these qualities than Thomas Carlyle's:

The greatest of faults I would say, is to be conscious of none. Readers of the Bible above all, one would think might know better. Who is called there 'the man according to God's own heart'? David, the Hebrew King, had fallen into sins enough; blackest crimes; there was no want of sins. And thereupon the unbelievers sneer and ask, Is this your man according to God's heart? Their sneer, I must say, seems to me but a shallow one. What are faults, what are the outward details of a life; if the inner secret of it, the remorse, temptations, true, often-baffled, never-ended struggle of it be forgotten? ... David's life and history, as written for us in those Psalms of his, I consider to be the truest emblem ever given of man's moral progress and warfare here below. All earnest souls will ever discern in it the faithful struggle of an earnest human soul towards what is good and best. Struggle often baffled, sorely baffled, down as into entire wreck; yet a struggle never ended; ever, with tears, repentance, true unconquerable purpose, begun anew. 1

King David was Berryman's kind of hero; the struggle to survive one's faults and "falls" with dignity and purpose amidst wreck and ruin is no less Henry's.

It would be tempting to identify Berryman himself with David, as it was for some reviewers when the poem appeared in the posthumous

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1. Thomas Carlyle, Heroes and Hero-Worship, Vol.5, The Works of Thomas Carlyle (London: Chapman and Hall Ltd., 1897), pp.46-47.

volume.<sup>1</sup> But clearly the poem is a dramatic monologue spoken by King David, and unlike "Lead Out the Weary Dancers," "Canto Amor," and even in a way "Dream Song 382," there is no sense of John Berryman the poet present in the poem. We hear a new style (Henry had said near the end of The Dream Songs, "I will not come again/or not come with this style" [The D.S. VII, 372/7]); Berryman's new style, which began with Love & Fame, is a style of a "newly simple heart" (D.E., p.54); so that it is not difficult to hear the almost traditional English voice of "King David Dances":

Aware to the dry throat of the wide hall in the world,  
 O trampling empires, and mine one of them,  
 and mine one gross desire against His sight,  
 slaughter devising there,  
 some good behind, ambiguous ahead,  
 revolted songs, a pierced son, bound to bear,  
 mid hypocrites amongst idolators,  
 mockt in abysm by one shallow wife,  
 with the ponder both of priesthood & of State  
 heavy upon me, yea,  
 all the black same I dance my blue head off!

(D.E., p.70)

This one sentence lyric has a good measure of the insistence, power, control and even the scent of sublimity of Milton's grand style in Paradise Lost. Perhaps "sublimity" is too large a word for so short a lyric as "King David Dances," but it is certainly a prelude to larger considerations of King David's past, present, and future, a suspended, whirling moment of the gamut of his experience, similar to the notion of a "canto" of "Canto Amor" which suggests the complex rhythms of a "marriage music." In Milton's daring opening to Paradise Lost (Berryman had agreed with most opinions many years before that Milton was "the supreme master of syntax"<sup>2</sup>), the verb is the key to the sentence. What Matthew Arnold said of Milton's opening lines applies as well to Berryman's

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1. See Larry Vonaft, "Berryman's Most Bright Candle," Parnassus, I (Fall-Winter, 1972), 187.
  2. Berryman, "The Poetry of Ezra Pound," p.388.

So chary of a sentence is he [Milton], so resolute not to let it escape him till he has crowded into it all he can, that it is not till the thirty-ninth word in the sentence that he will give us the key to it, the word of action, the verb. 1

Berryman's verb comes at nearly twice the distance, the seventy-fourth word. Though the real turn of the poem is "yea," we do not know, except for the title, that King David is dancing, and in fact we do not know that King David is speaking until the seventy-third word. In 1969 Berryman said that he had been translating Sophocles and he gave the following account of Sophocles's verse-sentences, which in idea sound similar to Arnold's description of Milton's periodic sentence:

... to mount one of those [Sophocles's] sentences -- it's scary, because you can see the period way down at the end of the third line, or the sixth line. You have to get on top of that sentence and ride it down. 2

In a sense we must "ride down" "King David Dances," but the sensation is more one of being caught in the animations of the dance before we realize we are in the dance; the senses, to remember Hume's point about the senses being the basis of thought, are played upon before the whole thought takes hold. And the dance in effect is enacted in the rhythm as in "Dream Song 382" and in part in "Canto Amor." Rhythm even takes precedence over imagery. The first line, "Aware to the dry throat of the wide hall in the world" is a striking image, but thereafter, factual descriptions come to life in the rhythm.

Before we turn to the simple and complex rhythms of the poem, we should recall the events surrounding King David's dance before the Ark of the Covenant. To the Hebrews the Ark was the visible symbol and the actual vehicle of the abiding presence of Yahweh; where the Ark was Yahweh was. Not long after David had established himself in Jerusalem,

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1. Cited by Christopher Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p.28. The passage from Arnold may be found in John Bryson, ed. *Matthew Arnold: Poetry and Prose* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), p.305.
  2. McClelland, et.al. "An Interview with John Berryman," p.8.

now the capital city, he sent for the Ark of the Covenant which was in Kirjath-jearim where it had been left and neglected for a generation. The occasion for bringing the Ark to its permanent home in Jerusalem was both political and religious ("the ponder both of priesthood & of State" as Berryman says): King David wished to celebrate the defeat of several enemies and to establish Jerusalem as the "City of David," and he wished to honor and give thanks to God who had blessed the Hebrews in their battles. It was one of David's greatest days and is recounted in II Samuel 6: 12-14:

And David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with joy. And it was so, that when they that bare the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. And David danced before the Lord with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod.

When David's wife Michal saw "King David leaping and dancing before the Lord," she "despised him in her heart" (she is the "one shallow wife" who "mockt in abysm"). Michal's objection to King David's dance is not altogether clear, but apparently she objected to David's unkingly conduct of dancing "with all his might"; she seemed to object most to his nakedness in front of "the handmaids of his servants." (Evidently David's "linen ephod," a loose priestly garment, was whirled up in his dance so that he indecently exposed himself.) But David's great day was not to be marred, and he replied, "It was before the Lord," or in Berryman's phrase "all the black same I dance my blue head off"; King David had no thought of himself, he was honoring God. The implications that Berryman manages to pack into "black" and "blue" are noteworthy: David's dance is "black" because in his wife's view he was unkingly, but "black" refers also to the "dry throat of the wide hell in the world"; "blue" of course suggests that he will dance till he is "blue in the face" and refers to his own "blue-blood" as King (Christ was to be his descendant).

As I have suggested, "King David Dances" comes to life in its rhythm. The pace in the long and short curves of the lines brings the reader into the dance. There is no description of King David himself as in "Dream Song 382"; his dancing "with all his might" and his "leaping and dancing before the Lord" are the poem itself. Unlike the early poem "Lead Out the Weary Dancers" the dance is not talked about, the "symbol" is not desired; Berryman has learned that symbols should appear to flow out of experience, and David's dance is meaningful because it is something he does rather than the poet's imposition of a symbol. Throughout Delusions, Etc. experience is mainly a dance before God, a dance in which the poet himself not only wishes to honor God, but also, like the Dancer who dances Henry away, wishes for God to dance him away. From the very first epigraph, which is taken from Matthew 11:17, the 1611 King James version, the poet is trying to reverse what Christ said in a parable: "We haue piped vnto you, and ye haue not danced: we haue mourned vnto you, and ye haue not lamented." Several verses before, Christ had said (again in the 1611 version):

Hee that hath eares to heare, let him heare.

and then he compared the present generation to sulky children playing a game of marriages and funerals, but who shout to others that they were not playing the game right:

But whereunto shall I liken this generation?  
It is like vnto children, sitting in the markets,  
and calling vnto their fellowes,

And saying, we haue piped vnto you, and  
ye haue not danced: we haue mourned vnto  
you, and ye haue not lamented.

Christ was suggesting that He had played His music and the listeners had not heard. So it was that King David had "heard" God and was responding to what he heard by dancing (we remember that Berryman said that "the poet has listened to life, so to speak, and he tells us that which he hears"<sup>1</sup>).

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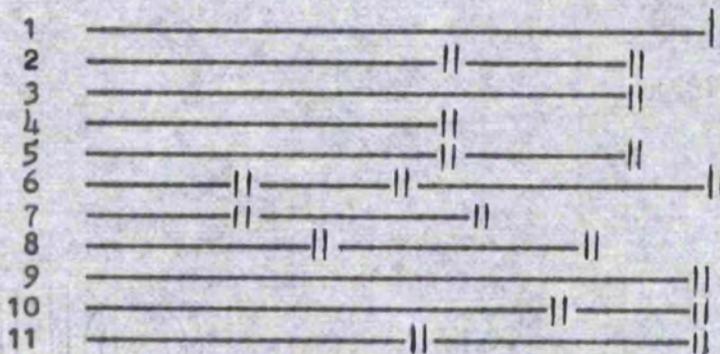
1. Berryman, "The Poetry of Ezra Pound," p.389.

And so, too, Berryman wants his readers and hearers to "hear" what King David heard.

The consonant yoking of phrases and the pace of meter begin the dance in the first line:

Aware to the dry throat of the wide hell in the world.

The "w" and "r" consonants subtly harmonize the whole line; the pattern of the two consonants illustrates how the sounds and words dissolve into each other (w,r,r,r,w,w,r). The meter rises and falls sharply; the alternating pyrrics and spondees ("to the dry throat of the wide hell") give a sharper sense of a knocking movement than a straight iambic line could. The first line moves steadily without a pause; then the second line varies the pace as the line pauses midway: "O trampling of empires, and mine one of them." Again the units are harmonized, "trampling of empires" and "mine one of them." And so one might continue to illustrate each line; but the overall, undulating movement of the poem is my main concern and perhaps the quickest way to illustrate this movement is with horizontal lines which represent the phrasal units and vertical lines, which represent the pauses; thus the whole poem may be seen to be a series of long and short dancing movements which do not stop completely until the end of the poem and which will continue, as King David implies, beyond the poem:



This linear hieroglyph of the poem is meant to be dissolved back into the whirling dancing movement of the poem where rhythm coalesces with meaning and experience. In "King David Dances," the man "according to God's own

heart" is in accord with his God and the poet's art is in accord with the experience of the man it describes; the dance, as Coleridge said of the "translucent" symbol, "partakes of the reality it renders intelligible."<sup>1</sup>

At the end of his essay on Pound's poetry, Berryman concluded, "let us listen to his music."<sup>2</sup> This is what I have attempted to hold in mind, to listen to Berryman's "music." An analysis of four poems which are meant to be representative of a long career, is suspect to a tidiness, but even a brief analysis suggests an undulating flow of poetics and reveals the essentially untidy nature of Berryman's rhythms. When in 1965 Berryman was asked, "Do you see your work as having essentially changed in character and style since you began?", he replied,

... of course. I began in verse-making as a burning trivial disciple of the great Irish poet William Butler Yeats, and I hope that I have moved off from there. One is obsessed at different times by different things, and by different ways of putting them. 3

Before he answered the question directly, Berryman had said, "I am less impressed than I used to be by the universal notion of a continuity of individual personality."<sup>4</sup> And this is true; but it is also true to say that simply because there is no direct line of continuity does not mean that the stages of a career divide sharply. The poet's obsessions "at different times by different things, and by different ways of putting them" inevitably act and react one upon the other so that the whole may be brought into a discernible field of rhythmic energy.

The spasms of Berryman's poetry seem to contract and expand roughly at three different periods. The first is <sup>that of</sup> the early poetry from about 1935 to 1945. The voice and the rhythms were subdued; Berryman had no distinctive

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1. Coleridge, The Complete Works, I, p.438.
  2. Berryman, "The Poetry of Ezra Pound," p.394.
  3. Berryman, "One Answer to a Question," p.68.
  4. Ibid., p.67.

voice of his own; he wrote in what he called a 'period style,' the Anglo-American style of the 1930's."<sup>1</sup> He struggled to connect experience with art but rhythm did not quite animate feeling and experience and his symbols became calcified. Then follows the next expansion from about 1945-1968, a complex and churning period which includes "The Nervous Songs," Berryman's Sonnets, Homage to Mistress Bradstreet, and culminates in his great work The Dream Songs. During this period his rhythms come alive, a mixture of excited and quiet rhythms, of disrupted syntax, of fusing art and experience in which his symbols seem to flow out of experience. The "difficult rhythms" of art spiral outward to animate the multifarious experience of the poet. And finally the last contraction between 1968 and 1972 when the muscles tighten and hold the simple style of the simple heart, discursive, chatty, sometimes harsh, curving into lyricism, back again and ending in an eloquent climax. Just as we observe the complex rhythms of style and symbol in Berryman's spasmodic career so we follow his concerns from a young artist trying to formulate the "easy rhythms" of his art to a more mature vision of "difficult rhythms" of how his art relates to and animates his own "rhythmic/phonic deep structures," and his experience with others and with God. Even in a sketchy consideration of the whole of Berryman's poetry, we begin to understand what Keats meant when he said that thought will eventually girdle round into a wholeness, but Berryman's art, anchored and girdled by thought though it is, cannot be regarded as a wholeness that is fixed. True, his art is a stasis, as all poetry is on the page, but his art is a dynamic stasis, always a process of life becoming art and art becoming life. T.S. Eliot said that "we may distinguish, but without precision, between poets who employ their verbal, rhythmic and imaginative gift in the service of ideas which they hold passionately, and poets who employ ideas which they

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1. Ibid., p.68.

hold with more or less settled conviction as material for a poem."<sup>1</sup>  
Such was Berryman's progress from a young poet who merely employed  
ideas to a mature poet who employed his "verbal, rhythmic and  
imaginative gift in the service of ideas," and, we might add, in  
the service of animating experience.

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1. T.S. Eliot, "Shelley and Keats," The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1933; 1964 edition), p.96.

PART II. JOHN KEATS: "mon semblable - mon frère"

"Between the true artists of any time, there is, I believe,  
an unconscious community."

"The Function of Criticism"  
T.S. Eliot

"We read fine things but never feel them to the full until  
we have gone the same steps as the Author."

John Keats to J.H. Reynolds,  
3 May 1818

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I have ignored for the most part the other essential in Berryman's poetics which helps to bring the poem to life—that of dramatization. Berryman felt that rhythm and style were not enough to give a sense of real life to the poem; he wanted a recognizable personality in the poem or at least a recognition that a personality was in or behind the poem. Berryman said of writing "The Ball Poem" (1942) that he had discovered the ambiguous pronoun in which the "commitment of identity can be 'reserved' so to speak.... The poet himself is both left out and put in the poem."<sup>1</sup> This ambiguous pronoun was to become a major poetic principle, a dramatic principle, actually, which enabled him to give a sense of unfolding experience. Without this principle, Berryman said, "I could not have written either of the two long poems that constitute the bulk of my work so far"<sup>2</sup> (the two long poems being Homage to Mistress Bradstreet and 77 Dream Songs). Berryman was not sure who pointed the way to this dramatic notion ("Rimbaud's 'Je est un autre' may have pointed the way, I have

1. Berryman, "One Answer to a Question," p.71.

2. Ibid.

no idea now,"<sup>1</sup> he writes in 1965). It could have been Whitman's empathic voices or Eliot's voices of The Waste Land or John Keats's notion of the "chameleon poet"; certainly, given Berryman's wide reading, any one of several poets could have influenced him. But it seems to me that there is ample evidence to suggest that John Keats's Letters pointed the way towards Berryman's own version of the "chameleon poet."

It would be impossible to measure the degree to which we are influenced by our reading, but we may be certain that reading, whether for pleasure or for a purpose, does work upon us. When Berryman was asked, "of what use do you think art is in the moral world?", his initial reaction was to recognize the impossibility of answering such a question ("I don't know. I really don't know"); the most he could say, or anyone can say with certainty, was that one may be influenced by his reading:

It is absolutely certain that you can learn a great deal about life from the novels of Jane Austen. Or from the later novels of George Eliot, say Middlemarch. Or from the plays of Shakespeare; that's an example at the highest level. It's very clear that the conduct of someone who has really read the whole Commedia is likely to be altered. 2

One's response, Berryman concluded, "issues in conduct or feelings."

The answer to how and to what extent reading alters one's conduct or feeling will vary with as many people who read, but it is clear that reading, and rereading, whether in an explosive pressure, a slow urgency, or a casual entertainment, sets into motion ideas and feelings. A poet, then, leeches onto and draws nourishment from other poets, and from other critics, philosophers, theologians, psychologists -- "anything is useful to the poet"<sup>3</sup> as Berryman observed.

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1. Ibid.

2. Berg, "A Truly Gentle Man Tightens and Paces: An Interview with John Berryman," p.17.

3. Stitt, "The Art of Poetry: An Interview with John Berryman," p.183.

Berryman marked in his own copy of Coleridge's Selected Poetry and Prose, a passage which suggests a useful way of approaching his own transformation of Keats's poetics: "To admire on principle is the only way to imitate without loss of originality."<sup>1</sup> One need only look at Berryman's early poetry in which he imitated the styles of Yeats and Auden to see that an exaggerated admiration of another poet's manner subsumes his own voice, clearly instances where Berryman failed to transform his models. I suggest then that the only way that he was able to overcome his influences was to concentrate on principles rather than style, for principles ("that which proceeds by any manner" as Aquinas says in Summa Theologica) nurtured the young poet and enabled him to become a mature poet. The mature poet of The Dream Songs would say of Keats's Letters, over thirty years after he first read them, that they are "so obscure" but "so important" (The D.S. VII, 364); the mature poet of Love & Fame would observe that in his youth when he went to Cambridge University the first two books he bought were Blake's Prophetic Books and Keats's Letters -- and then, like Keats, he went to "feel the Elgin marbles" (L. & F., p.46). In short, the mature poet would recognize that wherever his "voyage of conception" had taken him, Keats's remarkable Letters helped construct the craft in which he sailed.

#### i. The Problem of Influence

The dangers dictated by investigating the mélange of influences on a poet who read as widely as Berryman did can in fact help direct us towards a sound critical approach. The obvious danger of weaving together a poet's poems and what seem to be his influences is that such an analysis too often vexes and obscures our understanding of the poet's poems. One's

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1. S.T. Coleridge, Selected Poetry and Prose, ed. Stephen Potter (London: The Nonesuch Press, 1933), p.233.

reading undergoes "innumerable compositions and decompositions," as Keats said, which "take place between the intellect and its thousand materials before it arrives at that trembling delicate and small-horn perception of Beauty."<sup>1</sup> Given this process of "composition and decomposition" any critical assessment of influence must cautiously and selectively consider the poet's sources.

An exemplary study of a poet's sources would be J.L. Lowes's The Road to Xanadu. T.S. Eliot praised this scholarly study of the probable sources for Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Kubla Khan," but, he added, "one book like this is enough."<sup>2</sup> Eliot admitted that Lowes's study remains "a fascinating piece of detection," and, he concluded, Lowes "was engaged on an investigation of process, an investigation which was strictly speaking, beyond the frontier of literary criticism."<sup>3</sup> A study of sources, therefore, is properly a "secondary matter"<sup>4</sup> as Raymond Williams, perhaps taking his cue from Eliot, rightly suggests. But to recognize the limitation of studying influences does not altogether undermine the value of such a study. Even Eliot, in the same essay in which he describes Lowes's study as

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1. Maurice Buxton Forman, ed. The Letters of John Keats, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), p.129. Hereafter cited as Letters. Since Berryman used the Forman edition, throughout I refer to it rather than the Rollins two-volume edition (1950). See also my Appendix A for some of Berryman's notes to his copy of Keats's Letters. It would seem that Berryman had in mind the "innumerable compositions and decompositions" as being both a process of reading and of writing poetry. He indexes the page on which this quotation appears under "POETRY."
  2. T.S. Eliot, "The Frontiers of Criticism," On Poetry and the Poets (New York: The Noonday Press, 1961), p.119.
  3. Ibid.
  4. Raymond Williams, Culture and Society, 1780-1950. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1950), pp.71-72. "What is important..." Williams says of Carlyle's influences, "is the quality of his direct response: the terms, the formulations, the morphology of ideas, are properly a secondary matter, and as properly, also, the subject of influence."

being "beyond the frontier of literary criticism," must finally admit that "one can explain a poem by investigating what it is made of and the causes that brought it about; and explanation may be a necessary preparation for understanding."<sup>1</sup> The secondary matter of a poet's influence may indeed help towards a firm groundwork for our understanding of a poet's poetry as well as his poetic theory. This<sup>is</sup> particularly true of a poet like Berryman who did not leave a fully shaped poetic manifesto, at least in the published writing, like Eliot, Yeats, or Pound. We have only the critical attitude of his essays and the gathering of kindred spirits to whom he alludes in his poetry, but out of which, I believe, we may construct a recognizable poetic. This is to set out to steer between criticism which discovers and criticism which constructs, a course which should in the process produce two further values: first, a careful investigation of sources as comparison and contrast should lead to looking at the poems, in a new and fresh way, and second, comparing and contrasting several poets should help to place them in a recognizable tradition.

But when we consider Berryman's influences, special problems complicate our bringing direct sources into focus. His heroes make up a large personal gallery, rather like a gallery of fine art, blessed with unlimited resources, which buys only the finest paintings and gives a special place to each major group in separate rooms. In Berryman's house of reading, one room contains theologians, saints, and mystics (Augustine, Pascal, Luther, Mo-tsu); another statesmen (John Adams, Jefferson, Lincoln, John Kennedy); another essayists and critics (Henry Adams, Henry James, Swift, Elackmur, and Edmund Wilson); another psychologists and philosophers (Hegel, Freud, Jung, Reich, Eliade); another musicians (Beethoven, Bach, Mozart, Schubert, Scarlatti);

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1. Eliot, "The Frontiers of Criticism," p.122.

another painters (Goya, Renoir, Lautrec); another novelists (Tolstoy, Henry James, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Joyce); and finally, the largest and grandest room of all, poets (Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Blake, Wordsworth, Keats, Hopkins, Yeats, Auden, Eliot, Pound, Dylan Thomas, Housman, Whitman, Dickinson, Stephen Crane, Hart Crane, Robinson, Ransom, Frost, Williams, Rilke, Apollinaire, Corbière, Rimbaud, Lorca). Berryman's strong feeling for these and other heroes ranged from a youthful passion to a mature respect, and his strong feeling for them and their art was ever present. When Berryman was pointing out for an interviewer from Life magazine some historic memorials in Ireland, she commented that Berryman had a "rare gift for communicable literary hero worship."<sup>1</sup> Or again elsewhere, praising Mozart and his music, Berryman says

I've loved Mozart's music without reservation all my life, but he's so miraculous that you don't think of him personally as you do about Beethoven. But actually, when you think it all over - the letters, three volumes of them, translated by Emily Anderson - you see that you're dealing with a saint, not only a genius but an actual saint. His whole life was at the mercy of his art. 2

"A whole life at the mercy of his art" certainly explains Berryman's attraction to and his feeling of kinship with other artists. He himself was intensely committed to being a poet, from his earliest apprenticeship ("a young man can read eighteen hours a day"<sup>3</sup>) to his last frenetic years ("Berryman was spending for vast returns, was driving himself toward the next poem in a necessary frenzy"<sup>4</sup>). This intense commitment to poetry was spurred in part by his reading, which in turn spurred him to emulate other poets, until finally, like Rousseau who was not a musician but

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1. Howard, "Whisky and Ink, Whisky and Ink," p.73.
  2. Sisson, "My Whiskers Fly: An Interview with John Berryman," p.18.
  3. Berg, "A Truly Gentle Man Tightens and Paces: An Interview with John Berryman," p.14.
  4. Heyen, "John Berryman: A Memoir and an Interview," p.48.

imagined himself into actually being a <sup>composer</sup> conductor, Berryman willed himself into being a poet. When he says that as young, fumbling poet he did not "so much wish to resemble Yeats as to be Yeats,"<sup>1</sup> he is describing part of the process by which he buttressed up his poetic talent.

In a real sense his heroes were figures of security. When Robert Frost, "the Old Gentleman," dies Henry laments: "The high ones die, die. They die. You look up and who's there?" (The D.S. II, 36). Or again, when an eager young Berryman went to England to study at Cambridge, he wanted to "visit by hook or crook with W.B. Yeats" (L. & F., p.39). He finally did have tea with Yeats at the Athenaeum in London, against all efforts of a brash and confident Dylan Thomas who thought Berryman's admiration for Yeats to be "the funniest thing in that part of London."<sup>2</sup> As Berryman recalled, Yeats did most of the talking, but he was courteous and offered some advice on reading and poetry. But "the main thing," Berryman reflected, "was just the presence and existence of my hero."<sup>3</sup> Figures like Yeats were not simply figures of security, they were the "Overlords" and "Sponsors" of his art; these are the "great men" who "spring on us in a second," and for whom we "must be ready for a nod,/encountering a mystery" (The D.S. VII, 335). Berryman "manoeuvred" in his mind "their roles/of administration for the modern soul /in English" (L. & F., p.34); he

... elected that they witness to,  
show forth, transfigure: life-suffering & pure heart  
& hardly definable but central weaknesses

for which they were to be enthroned & forgiven by me.

(L. & F., p.34)

His heroes had to be "enemies throughout to accident & chance,/ relentless

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1. John Berryman, "One answer to a Question," p.68.
  2. Stitt, "The Art of Poetry: An Interview with John Berryman," p.187. Berryman was to celebrate this tea with Yeats throughout his poetry; see Berryman's Sonnets, number 5 and The Dream Songs (VI, 215).
  3. Ibid., p.188.

travellers, long used to failure..." (L. & F., p.34). "Humility and complex pride' were their "badges" and, "every 'third thought'" was "their grave" (L. & F., p.34). So many requirements suggest more than awe, they suggest a complex and full relationship which grew out of his reading and which developed and changed as he changed. When Berryman was a middle-aged and successful poet, he said of Eliot: "It took me a long time to catch on to Eliot. I now love him and have for a long time. But I had to get through a forest of objections."<sup>1</sup>

I have used the terms "Overlords" and "Sponsors"; they are actually Berryman's. He might have been writing about himself in his review of Saul Bellow's The Adventures of Augie March (1953). He says that Bellow's allusions to great men should be regarded as "Overlords"; they serve a "double use" for Augie:

They stand as figures of awe and emulation to Augie... -- corresponding in this to the heroes of his actual experience, such as Einhorn. And they create historical depth.... 2

But I detect in this a "triple use." Figures of awe and emulation and figures which create layers of historical depth are obviously the dual function of allusion he means, but "heroes of actual experience" might suggest a third use and thereby extend one's relationship to living heroes. Berryman's reading of living authors was nearly as extensive as that of the established dead ones, and he required of living authors at least the same intense commitment to art and the same excellence he required of the dead "great ones." He told humorous stories about his fellow writers "but without malice"; he saw fellow writers "not as rivals but as colleagues in a worthy cause."<sup>3</sup> He showed a generous spirit of honoring excellence in living writers. Monroe Engel, a colleague of Berryman's when he was at Princeton, recalls the company of writers there in the early 1950's:

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1. Heyen, "John Berryman: A Memoir and an Interview," p.57.
  2. John Berryman, "Speaking of Books," The New York Times Book Review, December 6, 1953, p.2.
  3. Robert B. Shaw, "An Interview with John Berryman," Antaeus, No.18 (Winter, 1973), p.7.

It was in the company of the writers in Princeton that Berryman showed his guild, a society which included... Blackmur, Fergusson, Schwartz, Saul Bellow, Ralph Ellison, Randall Jarrell and... the composer Edward T. Cone. Berryman, was, I think, the purest spirit of this society. He honored quality in other writers with no trace of jealousy -- with a sense rather that everything good enriched him. 1

In Berryman's review of recent volumes (1947) of poetry by Robert Lowell and Dylan Thomas, he makes the essential point: "In some very serious sense there is no competition either on Parnassus or on the hard way up there."<sup>2</sup>

Both on Parnassus and on the way up there, most artists will have much in common, their dedication to their art for example. So in a sense to compare the work or poetics of two poets would be to find happy affinities and provide an analogue. But given Berryman's intense feeling for his Overlords and Sponsors -- "I love great men I love" (The D.S. VI, 230) -- fairly sound conjectures about their influence can be made. Some influences were avowed and obvious, Yeats and Auden, for example; and illuminating comparisons between Yeats and Berryman could be developed at length: their concern about finding belief and faith, their passion for art, their acceptance of the impossibility of resolving contradictions in experience, their poetry woven into their lives, their passionate devotion to their friends (and as the source of many of their poems), the strong influence of their fathers, their preoccupation with a Lady, and so the list might continue. To some extent these are affinities of two poets in a common cause, to some extent Berryman felt a kinship with Yeats, but more to the point, we see a young poet who is imitating and trying to come to terms with all having been said ("Pereant qui ante nos nostra dixerunt," The D.S. VI, 225<sup>3</sup>) and who could accept this truth in his maturity. The most

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1. Monroe Engel, "An Educational Incident" The Harvard Advocate, Vol.103 (Spring 1969), p.18.
  2. Berryman, "Lowell, Thomas & Co.," p.73.
  3. "Deuce take those who said our smart sayings before us," Donatus.

he could do, as we have seen, was to make "new forms in which ancient thought appears" (The D.S. VII, 282). The "new forms" of style, line, and stanzaic structure would help free Berryman as much as he could be set free, but it was a long struggle:

I didn't want my next poem to be exactly like Yeats  
 or exactly like Auden  
 since in that case where the hell was I?  
 but what instead did I want to sound like?

(L. & F., p.25)

As I have suggested, the way he broke free of these influences was to follow Coleridge's suggestion of admiring on principle rather than imitating a style, and thereby an Overlord became a Sponsor; John Keats was one such Sponsor, who pointed the way towards Berryman's thinking about matters other than style.

#### ii. John Keats versus W.B. Yeats

In part Berryman's attraction to Keats would seem inevitable; it is easy to regard him as an ideal poet -- his talent, his sensitivity and humanity, his dedication to his art, his penetrating and natural insight are all ideals any poet would wish for. And, too, it was inevitable that Berryman would have carefully read Keats's Letters; as Eliot said of the Letters: "There is hardly one statement ... about poetry, which, when considered carefully and with due allowance for the difficulties of communication, will not be found to be true...."<sup>1</sup>

Barring any direct connection between Berryman and Keats, Keats's statements about poetry could be held up as a standard which would illumine Berryman's poetry, and to compare Keats and Berryman would help place Berryman in the Romantic tradition to which he belongs. There are, however, firmer, more direct connections between the two poets. In his criticism, Berryman alludes to ~~several~~ several of Keats's

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1. Eliot, "Shelley and Keats," p.101.

achievements. My earlier quotation -- "there is no competition either on Parnassus or on the hard way up there" -- is followed by something which is more than a salutary comparison:

Darley, that is, with Nepenthe and a lyric or so, is as good as Keats. ... But there is another sense in which it is sometimes worth saying that work like Keats's demonstrates that work like Darley's doesn't even exist. You can find in Keats everything you find in Darley, and you find it with transfigured power, and you find many other things as well. 1

Again, in an essay on Ezra Pound, Berryman holds up the authority of Keats's statement about the "impersonality of the poet" as a "piercing notion" for dramatic poetry.<sup>2</sup>

Both of these statements were written in the late 1940's,<sup>3</sup> and it is significant that Keats should occupy a special place in Berryman's criticism during this time, for the style and basic principles of his poetry were changing. A different version of the "impersonality of the poet" was becoming a major tenet in Berryman's poetic as he attempted to bridge the gap between the artist and his art and between life and art. Unlike Eliot's version of the "impersonality of the poet" -- the poet being outside the poem and "filling some other body" -- Berryman wanted to be inside the poem "filling some other body." That is to say, we see a conflict, a drama of the poet attempting to fill another body; the poet's personality, his self, exists as a recognizable personality, and in the poem we see him in the act of ("the piercing notion" of dramatic poetry) filling and identifying with another self. But in the end there is a conflict between life and art, between oneself and other selves. As Berryman, or at least the poet, says of a little boy who loses his ball and "senses first responsibility/In a world of possessions":

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1. Berryman, "L well, Thomas & Co.," p.73. That a "Hero" should have a transfiguring power, " would be observed over twenty years later in the poem "Heroes"; they must "witness to,/show forth, transfigure..." (L. & F., p.34).
  2. Berryman, "The Poetry of Ezra Pound," p.389.
  3. Keats in fact is mentioned several other times: See Berryman's "From the Middle to the Senior Generations" The American Scholar, XXVIII (Summer 1959), p.388 and "Neither Here nor There," The New York Times Book Review, May 31, 1964, p.14.

Soon part of me will explore the deep and dark  
 Floor of the harbour... I am everywhere,  
 I suffer and move, my mind and my heart move  
 With all that move me, under the water  
 Or whistling, I am not a little boy.

(TD, p.14)

A second conflict of art and life, the perfection of the poet's life or of his art, was straightforwardly proposed in Yeats's poem "The Choice." In that poem, Yeats suggested that the artist cannot perfect both his life and his art. Inevitably, Yeats would see such a choice; his own poetry, idealizing into symbol people, events, and nature from start to finish, relies on the symbol of the perfect and the pure, no cracks or decay are allowed. I say Yeats "seems to suggest" that the artist cannot perfect both his life and art, for it seems to me that Yeats is not so much expressing the possibility of perfecting his art or of making a perfect poem as he is expressing a desire to find a perfect symbol of the ideal, "a heavenly mansion, raging in the dark."<sup>1</sup> So the choice is not a matter of the perfect poem as opposed to the perfect life, the choice is a matter of the symbol of perfection as opposed to the symbol of imperfection. Berryman came to feel that the idea of a choice was nonsense; indeed, to him perfection of the life of the poet and of his art were simultaneous and complementary pursuits. One begins by recognizing that perfection is a pursuit rather than a realization, The Dream Songs being the best example of that impossibility. If the artist recognizes this impossibility, his symbols will not be of perfection. In the end, the poet may even reject symbols altogether because they distil the essence so much that the life from which they came seems far removed. Symbols can be like formulae, and, as Berryman says, "Formulas are of little use to the serious writer."<sup>2</sup> The poet describes "the folds," as Henry says in The Dream Songs, "not a symbol in the

1. Yeats, "The Choice," The Collected Poems, p.242.

2. Berryman, et.al. The Arts of Reading, p.207.

place." (The D.S. VII, 370). We are not meant to take this literally; "folds" suggest the dynamic kind of "symbol" we will find.

When Berryman was asked about Love & Fame and the relation between love and fame, he said that the volume was a

... general inquiry between two overmatched grabs in an ambitious young man: one for girls, one for poetry. And it fights itself out. Sometimes one is on top, sometimes the other. 1

Then the interviewer suggested, "That's the 'Perfection of the Life, or of the work' debate I suppose." Berryman replied,

Yes. "The intellect of man is forced to choose." I tell you, like you I admire that poem. It's wonderful. But it's full of shit. Because the results are not right, or if they are, the next poem will correct them. 2

His vague, though emphatic, protesting still does not answer the question.

We must turn to The Dream Songs and watch Yeats and Keats jockey for position in Henry's<sup>3</sup> dreams if we are to understand what perfection of life or art means and how the poet's life and his art may be complementary pursuits.

If we may take an epigraph as a touchstone, from the outset of The Dream Songs we are meant to have in mind several lines from John Keats's letter to Shelley in August 1820: "I am pickt up and sorted to a pip. My imagination is a monastery, and I am its monk."<sup>4</sup> A multiplicity of implications about the artist, his art, and the activity of writing are squeezed into this epigraph: the life of an artist is a solitary, even holy calling; others are excluded but perhaps live in the imagination; the imagination is the artist's supreme faculty which constructs a sacred dwelling (as opposed to a palace or tower of art) of discipline and transcendence. We are meant to begin by recognizing that the monastery of Henry's imagination in The Dream Songs will construct

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1. Heyen, "John Berryman: A Memoir and an Interview," p.65.
  2. Ibid.
  3. Throughout I shall assume that "Henry is not Berryman, but Berryman is Henry" as Douglas Dunn has shrewdly observed. See "Gaiety and Lamentation," Encounter Vol.43 (August 1974).
  4. Lines from this epigraph appear in Song 148; Song 370 alludes to it as well.

a place of some understanding and solace and a place where conflict between the inner and outer world may be temporarily abated, and where the conflict between the eternal ideal and the every day mortal may be momentarily calmed. This may be a blessing and a curse, for a conscious pursuit brings with it awareness, not merely idle curiosity; Henry is aware of both the stability his "useful mind" (The D.S. VII, 380) might construct and the instability his body imposes:

Awareness was most of what he had.  
The terrible chagrin to which he was married -  
derelict Henry's siege mentality -  
stability, I will stay

in my monastery until my death  
& the fate my actions have so hardly earned.

(The D.S. VII, 370)

Henry would wish to stay in his "monastery" but his human actions make it "hard" (difficult) to do so and therefore insufficient ("hardly"). The Song concludes, faintly suggesting the turning cycles of the seasons, that the monastery of the mind is not permanent: "Leaves on leaves on leaves of books I've turned/and I know nothing." Though "Henry in his youth read many things" (The D.S. VII, 364), though he "bought books to have his own/cunningly, like extra wings" and though he studied Keats's Letters, and though he returned again and again to great libraries, in the end, his monastery of knowledge is insufficient.

Since knowledge is insufficient and holy dwellings of the imagination are transient, the question remains, is there anything which remains constant? I have emphasized the pursuit of perfection and therein, I believe, lies the constancy. The activity of writing, whether it is done in electric spasms or a slow grind, can turn the paradox around: difficult and insufficient though human actions might be, the artist sustains his struggle until his perseverance becomes his dwelling place. In a review-article in 1959, when Berryman would have already started writing 77 Dream Songs, he suggested what the activity of writing poetry

might do to and for the poet:

Poetry is a terminal activity, taking place out near the end of things, where the poet's soul addresses one other soul only, never mind when. And it aims -- never mind either communication or expression -- at the reformation of the poet as prayer does. In the grand cases -- as, in our century, Yeats and Eliot -- it enables the poet gradually again and again, to become almost another man; but something of that sort happens, on a small scale, a freeing, with the creation of every real poem. 1

I take "creation of every real poem" to be the most important phrase for my argument here. Berryman seems to be suggesting that the "real poem" (perhaps even the perfect poem) will not present a conflict between the life of the poet and his art; each real poem will renew him and like a tree shedding and regrowing leaves in the turning seasons, he creates his own renewal. The substance of Berryman's argument ignores the reader and narrows to the relation between the poet and his poem. The "real poem," however, must take into account the reader's response; the reader must see something of the real as well. On the basis of this relation between the poem and the reader, Berryman (Henry) rejects Yeats and accepts Keats as his Sponsor. He does not doubt the real power of poetry to renew Yeats himself, but he does doubt the power of Yeats's symbolist poetry to give the reader a sense of the real. Edmund Wilson once said that "the battle of Symbolism has never properly been fought out in English."<sup>2</sup> In Berryman's poetry we find if not a full scale battle, a hard fought skirmish as exemplified in Keats and Yeats meeting in Henry's dreams.

Yeats and Keats meet in what seems an innocent and speculative comparison:

The doomed young envy the old, the doomed old the dead young.  
It is hard & hard to get these matters straight.  
Keats glares at Yeats

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1. Berryman, "The Revolving Bookstand: From the Middle and Senior Generations," p.386.
  2. Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle (London: Collins-Fontana, 1959), p.26.

who full of honours died & being old sung  
his strongest. Henry appreciated that hate,  
but what now of Yeats'

lucky of-Fanny-free feeling for Keats  
who doomed by Mistress Gonne proved barren years  
and saw his friends all leave,  
stale his rewards turn, & cut off then at his peak,  
promising in his seventies! all fears  
save that one failed to deceive.

(The D.S. VI, 190)

Perhaps we are meant to see this comparison of Keats and Yeats as nothing more than Henry's "scrounging" for "ensamples" (a phrase in itself which binds together opposites -- middle English and modern slang), as he says in the third stanza, but Keats "glaring" at Yeats does point to the conflict of poetic principle which has been slowly developing. In fact, the line "All we fall down and die," following the two <sup>stanzas</sup> quoted above, suggests in part one of Henry's reasons for rejecting Yeats. Henry concludes that Yeats used, rather than lamented, death in his poetry; death was a symbol rather than a reality.

In part VII, the final section which is set in Ireland, Henry finally rejects Yeats's principle of the relation between life and art and, implicitly, accepts Keats's principles. Henry goes to Dublin to "have it out" with Yeats, the "majestic Shade" (The D.S. VII, 312) of his apprenticeship. Henry recalled in part VI his great honor in having tea with Yeats at the Athenaeum (we recall that Berryman did as well). But now the middle-aged and mature Henry questions more dispassionately the principles of his master whom he "read so well" so many years ago :

... did I read your lesson right? did I see through  
your phases to the real? your heaven, your hell  
did I enquire properly into?

For years then I forgot you, I put you down,  
ingratitude is the necessary curse  
of making things new:  
I brought my family to see me through,  
I brought my homage & my soft remorse,  
I brought a book or two



these last poems depend upon the same method of his earlier poetry. In many of Last Poems the major part of the poem is symbolical; then he seems to tack on the passion at the end -- the tip of the iceberg is passion, but the great undersides are symbolic. When he would bid farewell to his symbolic principle in "The Circus Animals' Desertion," the poem remains, as G.S. Fraser observes, "a triumphant example"<sup>1</sup> of the symbolist method.

On the other hand, one might argue that these Last Poems, though they clearly rely on the symbolist method, are, nevertheless, a sustained refutation of symbolism and that they successfully do so because most of the poems are enactments of passion rising above the symbols. Those marvelous flourishes at the end -- "say my glory was I had such friends" -- are not flourishes at all, so the argument goes, but rather, realizations that the poet cannot hold his passion in a pattern or a symbol. Henry (Berryman) is not tempted by such interpretations.<sup>2</sup> Just as Yeats was questioning the basic principles of all his previous work, so Henry questions Yeats's success in injecting blood-life, or "blood-wisdom" as Lawrence would call it, into his poetry, and he concludes that Yeats did not succeed. Yeats's new enlightenment of passion, his "grief of all his grievous friends" amounts to a "distinguisht wail" (The D.S. VII, 334); though he might beat his chest and wear sackcloth and ashes, his wails do not translate because they are "distinguisht." Rhetoric gets in the way; it elevates and cloaks his strong feeling; his language, quite simply, is not transparent enough for Henry to see

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1. G.S. Fraser, W.B. Yeats (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1965), p.23.
  2. Compare what Robert Lowell said about his not wanting symbols but rather "experience" in his poetry. See his interview with V.S. Naipaul in The Listener, LXXXII (September 4, 1969), 304, where Lowell says of Life Studies: "It's about direct experience and not symbols."

through to the real feeling.<sup>1</sup>

I am implying that on the basis of language Henry rejects Yeats's principles of the relation between art and life, but the actual rejection is dramatized by the way of Yeats's poems on Roger Casement. In a letter in 1938 Yeats wrote, "For us a legendary man or woman must still be able to fight or to dance"<sup>2</sup>; but Yeats uses Casement in this case as a symbol, Henry concludes; Yeats does not give us a sense of Casement as a real man in a real conflict who died a real death. (Casement was an Irish patriot who was executed in London for high treason.) In his poem "Roger Casement," Yeats's admiration is dressed in polite language and generalizations; Casement is that "most gallant gentleman" whose name was "blackened" by forgery.<sup>3</sup> "'The Forged Casement Diaries' by Dr. Maloney," as Yeats refers to them, were to Yeats's mind an attempt to discredit Casement's character. Probably with the forged Parnell diaries in mind, Yeats did not believe that the homosexual passions of Casement's private life had existed. But Henry believes that they did:

... the note from my bank this morning was stamp'd  
with Sir Roger Casement,  
no, 'Sir,' just the portrait & years:  
about whom Yeats was so wrong  
This distinguisht & sensitive man lived in the grip  
of a homosexual passion, even the 'tools' of native  
policemen  
excited him.<sup>4</sup>

(The D.S. VII, 334)

1. I shall discuss "transparent poetry" when I come to Love & Fame. Basically, in transparent writing the reader has no sense of the art of expression but sees directly through the language to the experience, as in this example from The Dream Songs:  
Punctured Henry wondered would he die  
forever, all his fine body lost  
and his very useful mind? (The D.S. VII, 380)
2. Cited by Joseph Hone, W.B. Yeats 1865-1939 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1962), p.468.
3. Yeats, "Roger Casement," The Collected Poems, p.303.
4. In 1963 Berryman published another Dream Song on Casement but did not collect it in The Dream Songs in 1968. This would suggest that Berryman had in mind early on Henry's rejection of Yeats, and that his trip to Ireland, in part VII, was almost inevitable. See Ramparts, II (May 1963), 12.

It makes little difference whether Yeats believed that Casement was homosexual. Henry is objecting to Yeats's poem because he does not recognize Casement's human struggle; we observe "a mind in the act of idealization"<sup>1</sup> as Harold Bloom says of an earlier poem, "A Prayer for My Daughter."

Yeats's other poem about Roger Casement refines the real man even further out of existence. Casement's ghost returns to warn not a person but a country; he is an abstract symbol of integrity who returns to warn imperialist "John Bull" that "there's no luck about a house/If it lack honesty."<sup>2</sup> Yeats's Casement poems, Henry seems to be suggesting, serve as general statements about his Last Poems; inevitably Henry concludes:

Yeats knew nothing about life: it was all symbols  
& Wordsworthian egotism: Yeats on Cemetery Ridge  
would not be scared, like you & me,  
he would have been, before the bullet that was his,  
studying the movements of the birds,  
said disappointed & amazed Henry.

(The D.S. VII, 334)

Henry exaggerates when he says that "Yeats knew nothing about life"; he knew quite a bit about life.<sup>3</sup> It would be more accurate, though less emphatic, to say that real life is refined out of his poems; he framed and sculpted the essence without creating a sense of that transparent tissue covering the real; there is not "the living rock of his own feelings" as D.H. Lawrence said of poets in 1900.<sup>4</sup> Having dealt with one side of

1. Bloom, Yeats, p.325.

2. Yeats, "The Ghost of Roger Casement," The Collected Poems, p.304.

3. Compare John Bayley's statement about Yeats's sense of "life" in his poetry: "Yeats's poetic statements often end... on a note of acceptance -- acceptance of everything life has to offer. But when we compare it with other kinds of literary expression we may feel that this attitude is one that goes well into poetry but bears little relation to the lives we actually have to lead." Or again, "Yeats's 'acceptance' of life, in fact, often seems very much like a renunciation -- where poetry is concerned -- of what actually happens in life." The Romantic Survival, p.127 and p.128.

4. H.T. Moore, ed. The Collected Letters of D.H. Lawrence (London: Heineman, 1962), p.20.

the conflict between life and art Henry also suggests the other, the conflict between the poet's life and his art. He says that Yeats would not have expressed his fear of death (on Cemetery Ridge), but would have looked for something symbolic in the movements of birds, perhaps alluding to the gyre of the falcon in "The Second Coming" or to the daws in "The Tower." Henry is implying that Yeats expressed his fear of death in a pattern or symbol and thus ignored and objectified his fear beyond feeling. In this sense, Yeats committed artistic suicide ("the bullet that was his") like Henry's father who shot himself, by not expressing his human fear "like you & me."

Having rejected his master Yeats, Henry is not left entirely on his own. He finds other confrères, as he calls Wordsworth in "Cadenza on Garnette" (L. & F., p.114); all of them, like Wordsworth, attempted to set down the real into words and yet retain a strong sense of the life from which they came. His Sponsors, rather than Overlords, are now "Pascal, Spinoza, & Augustine, /Kafka & all his tribe" (The D.S. VII, 347), and "Dante & Rimbaud" (The D.S. VII, 348), and Keats and Wordsworth, that is, not the "egotistical sublime" Wordsworth. After he rejects Yeats, Henry alludes to and praises Keats: Henry resorts "to the Morgan for Keats's letters" (The D.S. VII, 364); he alludes to the Keats epigraph, "I will stay in my monastery until my death" (The D.S. VII, 370); and finally he directly addresses Keats, "Oh ho, you lovely man!" (The D.S. VII, 380). This final interjection, coming near the end of The Dream Songs, would suggest that Keats is un frère in Henry's quest to give a sense of life in his art. Wordsworth, on the other hand, is un confrère; he is a figure "almost divine" (my italics) as Henry says of him in the same poem he addresses Keats. We recall that Henry rejected Yeats for his "Wordsworthian egotism" and here again he tosses up Keats's epithet "the egotistical sublime." Henry asks Wordsworth to "make from the rafters some mere sign" (The D.S. VII, 380). If Henry were to be

granted a sign which he would believe, it would have to be "from the rafters"; it would have to be from within a real and recognizable house not from somewhere beyond. Of course no sign illuminates the way; he is left on his own with his "raving heart," "punctured body" and his "very useful mind" (The D.S. VII, 380). The most he can say by the end is that his "house is made of wood and it's made well" (The D.S. VII, 385).

No sublime remains, but Henry does have his new Sponsors and Keats's Letters which are "so important" (The D.S. VII, 380). The sign Henry longs for is given in the works of these earthly, earth-bound Sponsors: Dante's Divine Comedy, Augustine's Confessions, Pascal's Pensées, Rimbaud's Une Saison En Enfer, Kafka's The Trial. These exemplars have in common their suffering of the real and their struggle to express the real so that we see through their art to life. Keats's Letters, not meant for publication and therefore not so self-consciously polished, are as close to transparent writing as is possible to write: they have "no palpable design upon us"<sup>1</sup>; they have a quality of "unobtrusiveness" that Keats admired so much in Elizabethan poetry; we "witness to" and he "shows forth" a lively and distinctive personality which naturally unfolds and develops; we see through to the real as much as words will allow. Keats's Letters are both an example of a bridge between life and art and a mine of principles about poetry which would be the "mere signs" for Henry and John Berryman.

### iii. Berryman and Keats's Letters

Berryman's rejection of what he felt to be Yeats's kind of symbolism and his tacit kinship with Keats brings us finally to the

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1. I recognize that Keats's Letters may not have "a palpable design upon us" but they did have a design upon the person to whom they were written. But it seems to me, taken as a whole, his personal and public "masks" reveal the man more than his art does or an autobiography could.

very fundamentals of Berryman's poetics. Perhaps Berryman's most significant reference to Keats was in an essay on Ezra Pound (1949). "Does not any reader who is familiar with Pound's poetry," Berryman emphasizes throughout the article, "really not see that its subject is the life of the modern poet?"<sup>1</sup> He felt that most critics had been more interested in Pound's craft than his "expressive personality":

... they [the critics], have been blinded, perhaps, by the notion of the 'impersonality' of the poet. This perverse and valuable doctrine, associated in our time with Mr. Eliot's name, was toyed with by Goethe and gets expression in Keats's insistence that the poet 'has no identity -- he is continually in, for, and filling some other body.' For poetry of a certain mode (the dramatic) this is a piercing notion. 2

Nearly thirty years later in an interview, Berryman would emphasize the notion again (in between his poems reflect his concern with the personality of the poet); when he was asked why he called The Dream Songs "one poem rather than a group of poems in the same forms," he replied:

Ah -- it's personality -- it's Henry.... The reason I call it one poem is the result of my strong disagreement with Eliot's line -- the impersonality of poetry, an idea he got partly from Keats (a letter) and partly from Goethe (again a letter). I'm very much against that; it seems to me on the contrary that poetry comes out of personality. For example Keats -- I'm thinking of La Belle Dame Sans Merci, I'm thinking of that; and I'm thinking of Hopkins -- any one of the sonnets. 3

Donald Davie observes that after Eliot's era, the view of the personality of the poet was completely reversed, and of course Berryman and Lowell played leading roles in this turnabout. As Davie put it, "A poem in which the 'I' stands immediately and unequivocally for the author" is at the present time (1968) "essentially and necessarily superior to the poem in which the 'I' stands not for the author but for a persona of the author's." Lionel Trilling, who cites this quotation from Davie's essay, comments: "This striking reversal of doctrine Mr. Davie speaks of as a return to the romanticist valuation of sincerity; the title he

1. Berryman, "The Poetry of Ezra Pound," p.389.

2. Ibid.

3. McClelland, et al. "An Interview with John Berryman," p.5.

gives his essay is: 'On Sincerity: From Wordsworth to Ginsberg'.<sup>1</sup> But Berryman seems to have struck a compromise between the "I" as the author and the "I" as a persona in The Dream Songs; we are aware only of the presence of John Berryman because he and Henry are remarkably similar. After The Dream Songs in Love & Fame and Delusions, Etc., the "I" does stand "immediately and unequivocally for the author," though there are several different voices in Delusions, Etc. which do not stand for the author.

Now these are large assertions of large principles. To understand the notions of the personality of the poet in the poem, what they imply, and the high thinking which led Berryman to formulate them in tandem with Keats and Eliot (not forgetting Yeats) is a very complex task indeed. But these principles -- experience, knowledge, personality, intuition, empathy, identity -- may be brought round into a cohesive cluster. In order to draw the bits together I shall take Keats's "piercing notion" of the chameleon poet as a pivot, and look first at the thinking which led Keats and Berryman to the notion, and then turn to the notion itself, and finally, examine the implications of it for Berryman's poetics.

Berryman bought his copy of Maurice Buxton Forman's second edition of Keats's Letters in September 1936 when he was in London on his way up to Cambridge.<sup>2</sup> His own careful notations and index, in contrast with his sparse notations in his copy of Keats's poems,<sup>3</sup> reveal his real concern: he was a young poet in search of stated and accessible principles. To ferret out poetic principles from a poet's poems may be

1. Lionel Trilling, Sincerity and Authenticity (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp.8-9. The essay by Donald Davie is in Encounter, October 1968, pp.61-66.
2. Berryman's own copy is inscribed, "J.A. McA. Berryman from my grandmother" and dated "28 Sept 1936."
3. Berryman's copy of Keats's poems was H. Buxton Forman, ed. The Metrical Works of John Keats (London: Oxford University Press, 1934).

too difficult (as it ~~was~~ <sup>proved</sup> when ~~he~~ <sup>Berryman</sup> imitated Yeats's poetry and finally realized the underlying principles of his poetry); prose statements are usually less ambiguous principles. Had Berryman searched out and compared the poetic principles in both Keats's letters and his poetry any solid touchstone would have probably dissolved, for Keats's intentions and his practice never seemed to coincide. He only half realized in his poetry the principles he sweepingly and rapidly worked out in his Letters: "it is easier to think of what Poetry should be," he wisely observed, "than to write it."<sup>1</sup> But if we hope to find absolutely firm principles in Keats's Letters, we will be disappointed; his Letters were his worksheets ("I can scarcely express what I but dimly perceive"<sup>2</sup>), neither did he begin with set principles nor did he settle into a unified creed: "If I scribble long letters," he says, "I must play my vagaries."<sup>3</sup> That he did, but his Letters do have, paradoxically, a quality of "proper compactness," as he asserts:

... some kind of letters are good squares and others handsome ovals, and other s some orbicular, others spheroid -- and why should there not be another species with two rough edges like a Rat-trap? I hope you John Hamilton Reynolds will find my letters all of that species, and all will be well; for by merely touching the spring delicately and etherially, the rough edge will fly immediately into a proper compactness.... 4

Nevertheless, as a practical matter, the spring is not so easily sprung; all does not fly "immediately into a proper compactness," but his ideas

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1. Forman, ed. Letters, p.108. As John Bayley points out, Keats imposed upon his poetry and himself "patterns of romantic aspirations that do not fit.... To discuss his poetry as if the patterns did fit leads us further into abstraction, into regions where Keats himself was only too anxious to go, but where his poetry obstinately refused to follow." See "Keats and Reality," Proceedings of the British Academy (1963), p.94. See also Douglas Bush, "Keats and His Ideas," in English Romantic Poets, ed. M.H. Abrams, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p.328.
  2. Forman, ed. Letters, p.336.
  3. Forman, ed. Letters, p.142.
  4. Forman, ed. Letters, p.142.

do, after close study, begin to cohere. Having enough with which to contend in the Letters, I shall limit my discussion, as Berryman seems to have limited his concern, to the ideas and poetics Keats tried to work out in his Letters. Any attempt to prove that Keats's poems affirm the principles of his Letters would be gratuitous; Berryman's assertion of and building upon Keats's principles yields more.

Berryman seemed to not so much read Keats's Letters as to savour the meatiest, most nourishing chunks. Various line markings, marginal notations, and Berryman's two-page index where he plucked out a number of topics and phrases, indicate just how thoroughly and carefully Berryman read the Letters. Occasionally, Berryman duplicated Forman's extensive index, but for the most part he obviously wanted to carve out his preferences and set down points of reference which were important to him. This sounds like a heartless pursuit, a careful poet with a scholar's cool eye dispassionately gleaning bits of detail and pattern. But Berryman's notations and index suggest that he was as much interested in and attuned to the living, suffering, loving Keats as he was his poetics. Alongside his notations of Keats's poetic principles we find such categories as "humour," "remorse," "vices," "forbearance," "sex," "misogyny," "pride," "his shortness," and "(rare) malice." His empathic notations of Keats's suffering undercut any thought of someone reading with a remote and impersonal detachment. Examples are easy to find: in a letter in which we would expect Keats to mention the Blackwood attack, an attack which hurt him deeply, Berryman perceptively conjectures in his index that Keats's pain over the attack is transferred, in this letter at least, to his brother's suffering: "v[ery] gay letter, yet inconceivable he'd not seen the article yet [the Blackwood attack]: yet a letter tortured over Tom"; or again, in a marginal notation, Berryman's outburst of sympathy for Keats, who was dying in Rome, leaps on to the

margin, "O my God."<sup>1</sup>

If Berryman's edition of Keats's Letters were not available, we could, nevertheless, establish their kinship of concerns and inclinations -- even a brief sketch attests to a rich kinship: their intense feeling for and recognition of the importance of love and death in their lives and in their art; their devotion to friends; their idealization of women (both in their lives and in their art); their "gusto" and relish for the sensuous; their bouts with depression; their feeling that suffering was a necessary impetus for the poet's creativity; their sense of perfecting an art with "the true voice of feeling"; their willingness for and insistence upon experimenting with form; their willed changes of style; their attempt to relate life and art in their poetry; their belief in the necessity of the poet's presence (his identity) inside and outside the poem; their belief that poetry embraces the sublime high and the carnal low; their belief in "doing the world some good"; their patriotism; their concern with fame, alternatively craving fame and rejecting it; their focus on the reader (their initial readers being "a gallant few"); their philosophic turn of mind; their belief in the authority of knowledge; their search for the "middle ground" between the assurance of knowledge and the doubts which unpredictable experience imposes; their belief in the significance of dreams; their desire to broaden their experience by travelling; their wish for death; their frustration and defeat in writing a complete epic poem; their unfulfilled aspirations of writing drama; their strong feeling for Greek antiquity; their passion for music; their sharp swings from the security of an independent confidence to the anxiety of a subsuming influence, even down to their great interest in Shakespeare. Like Henry, in a rather Keatsean phrase, they were

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1. Forman, ed. *Letters*, p.529. Berryman's comment appears on the margin of a letter from Charles Brown in which Brown scolds Keats for not writing to "a certain girl next door." The painful irony was that Keats was not physically able to write, nor, if the last extant letters are indeed all that Keats wrote, did he write again after he received Brown's letter.

"tasting all of the secret bits of life" (The D.S. III, 74), and, one might add, Berryman was tasting the secret bits of poetry in Keats's Letters.

#### iv. Shakespeare -- Exemplar and Presider

Any one of these affinities between Berryman and Keats could be drawn out into a lengthy discussion, but there is little need to rattle them all just to see what will fall out. One approach (which might at first seem oblique but which will, I believe, best illustrate Berryman's poetic principles) is by way of Shakespeare, that great exemplar for both Keats and Berryman. Keats's reverence for Shakespeare as a Presider or Sponsor is well known; he writes to Haydon:

I remember your saying that you had notions of a good genius presiding over you. I have of late had the same thought....  
Is it too daring to Fancy Shakespeare this presidor [sic?] 1

One might expect Berryman to index this under "Shakespeare," but it will be found under the more specific category of "inspiration." So it would be; from Berryman's stay at Cambridge, where he won the Oldham Shakespeare award, to middle age, Shakespeare presided ("I've had him in my mind since I was twenty years old"<sup>2</sup>); even one study room in his home was designated "The Shakespeare Room." When he was asked about his own critical work, Berryman set Shakespeare apart: "fiction, poetry, and Shakespeare."<sup>3</sup> Although he published only a review and a biographical-critical essay on Shakespeare,<sup>4</sup> he left many notes and outlines: he had planned to write a biography of Shakespeare, another book to be called

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1. Forman, ed. Letters, p.29.
  2. Stitt, "The Art of Poetry: An Interview with John Berryman," p.182.
  3. Lunegaard, "Song of a Poet," p.2.
  4. John Berryman, "Shakespeare's Text," The Nation, CLVII (August 21, 1943) 218-9, and "Shakespeare at Thirty," The Hudson Review VI (Summer 1953), 175-203.

Shakespeare's Reading, and a critical edition of King Lear. Berryman said that Delmore Schwartz once asked him why, with all of his study of Shakespeare, it never showed up in his poetry. Very oddly, Berryman replied that he seemed "to have been sort of untouched by Shakespeare."<sup>1</sup> The interviewer rightly disagreed and cited an example from The Dream Songs, and Berryman conceded, "I would call that Shakespearian."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, how can one avoid comparing Berryman's Sonnets with Shakespeare's, or not hear Edgar's "Ripeness is all" (V,ii,11) in Henry's "touch the means/ whereby we ripen" (The D.S. VII, 305).<sup>3</sup> In another interview, Berryman more readily acknowledged his debt to Shakespeare:

I learned an immense amount from Shakespeare.... How to be brief. How to be, or try to be, gorgeous. You know, lyric grandeur. But the main thing I learned from him is that you put people together and in action and see what happens.

That's what I did in Dream Songs.... The point is to have a maximum amount of activity and see what happens. 4

The "main thing" Berryman learned from Shakespeare was the stuff of drama: characters, interacting, seeing what happens -- all set into motion in the proliferative ground of experience. Shakespeare's concern was to create "real" characters living out their experiences unlike Yeats's characters; "it is clear," Berryman said of Yeats's plays, "that Yeats has not been concerned, as Shakespeare we assume was concerned, with the creation of a recognizable and individual character."<sup>5</sup> Shakespeare was not Berryman's only point of reference for the dramatic; in an epigraph to The Dream Songs he alludes to Olive Schreiner's distinction between two dramatic methods of presenting human life. One method, she says,

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1. Stitt, "The Art of Poetry: An Interview with John Berryman," p.182.
  2. Ibid.
  3. There are other references to Shakespeare from Twenty Poems: "The Statue," (a reference to Coriolanus) and "Song from 'Cleopatra'" seems to owe something to Shakespeare. <sup>See also</sup> "Love & Fame" "Shirley Auden" (a quotation from Henry V) and "Views of Myself" (again Coriolanus).
  4. Lunegaard, "Song of a Poet," p.2.
  5. Berryman, "The Ritual of W.B. Yeats," p.26.

... is the stage method. According to that each character is duly marshalled at first, and ticketed; we know only with immutable certainty that at the right crises each one will reappear and act his part, and when the curtain falls, all will stand before it bowing. There is a sense of satisfaction in this, and of completeness. 1

Berryman's epigraph consists merely of Schreiner's transitional sentence, "But there is another method," and thereby implies that he wants us to have in mind a second method. Schreiner continues:

But there is another method -- the method of the life we all lead. Here nothing can be prophesied. There is a strange coming and going of feet. Men appear, act and re-act upon each other, and pass away. When the crisis comes, the man who would fit it does not return. When the curtain falls no one is ready. When the footlights are the brightest they are blown out; and what the name of the play is no one knows. If there sits a spectator who knows, he sits so high that the players in the gaslight cannot hear his breathing. 2

It should be made clear that neither Schreiner nor Berryman were simply attempting to transfer drama to fiction and poetry. They seem to be implying that any art which uses words should come out of and reenact experience, and that the principle of characters interacting, that essential quality of drama, will therefore become the essential quality of fiction and poetry.

We may readily understand why Berryman chose this epigraph from Schreiner, for Shakespeare's drama is perhaps the best example of an art based upon "the life we all lead." The difference between Greek drama and Shakespearean drama (and by extension, the difference between Yeats's symbolist poems and Berryman's poems of experience) may be stated in terms of Schreiner's two methods: Greek drama (like symbolist poems) relies upon the "stage method"; the characters are "marshalled" and "ticketed"; the audience leaves with a sense of a formulated completeness. We find in Shakespearean drama (like the poetry of experience), on the other hand, <sup>that</sup> "nothing can be prophesied"; the characters are not "marshalled"

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1. Olive Schreiner, The Story of an African Farm, 2nd edition, (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1883), p.7.
  2. Ibid., pp.7-8.

and "ticketed"<sup>but</sup> seem to be allowed to determine their own fate; the audience leaves with a sense of the life we all lead, ambiguous and incomplete. In Shakespeare's drama, experience becomes the center of things and dictates what the order of Greek drama could not hold. So it is in Berryman's poetry, especially the long poems and the poem sequences like his Sonnets and "Opus Dei," any sense of where one is going, or where one has come from for that matter, may not be satisfactorily determined. Like Shakespeare's heroes who strain after an order which will not stay in place, Berryman's characters may say of themselves (as Berryman says of himself),

I am a follower of Pascal in the sense that I don't know what the issue is, or how it is to be resolved -- the issue of our common life, yours, mine, everybody's.... 1

Of course Henry is the best example of this unresolve: "He is so troubled and bothered by his many problems," Berryman said, "that he never actually comes up with solutions." Then he added "from that point of view the poem is a failure."<sup>2</sup> But from the point of view of "the life we all lead" it is successful.

The dramatic poem, however, has limitations. The dramatic poem, unlike the play, is not intended for performance, or, if it is performed, we hear only a voice, seeing the character is not so important. Nor does the dramatic poem approach the texture of Shakespearean drama. Nevertheless, like Shakespeare's drama, generally speaking, Berryman's dramatic poems give us an enactment of characters put into action in which we see what happens. During the time between Shakespeare and Berryman, it is not too great a claim to say that the dramatic poem, or variations of it -- the dramatic monologue being the largest off-shoot -- became a major direction in the writing of poetry in the Elizabethan and Romantic Traditions.<sup>3</sup> In whatever variation of the dramatic poem, two

1. Kostelanetz, "Conversation with Berryman," p.345.

2. Ibid., p.346.

3. See Robert Langbaum's The Poetry of Experience (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1957). See especially chapter 1, pp.38-74.

basic elements make up the bedrock of it: character and plot. Both, however, should be qualified and explained within the limits of the dramatic poem.

Length determines the difference between characterization in the dramatic poem and characterization in the Shakespearean play. In the dramatic poem we see a limited view, we understand only the essence, we see a character in an isolated moment, a quick sketch in contrast with the fuller portrait in Shakespeare. We may find in a long poem a more complete characterization, as in The Prelude or in The Dream Songs, because we watch a character interacting with others over a long period of time, but these are exceptions. Ezra Pound, who learned his lesson well from Robert Browning, said of the short "so-called dramatic lyric" that he was interested only in the moment which suggested the whole:

I catch a character I happen to be interested in at the moment he interests me, usually a moment of song, self-analysis, or sudden understanding or revelation. And the rest of the play would bore me and presumably the reader. 1

So it is in Berryman's short dramatic poems, but as we have seen in such poems as "Canto Amor" and "King David Dances" Berryman more explicitly signifies experiences beyond the moment of self-revelation.

Shakespeare, as Robert Langbaum has convincingly argued, was the model which allowed the 19th century poets like Browning to bring the dramatic poem to a high level of achievement. In the early 19th century, Langbaum says, the Romantics read Shakespeare much "as they read the literature of their own time":

They read... [Shakespeare] not as drama in the traditional Aristotelean sense, not in other words as a literature of external action in which the events derive meaning from their relation to a publicly acknowledged morality, but as literature of experience, in which events have meaning in as much as they provide the central character with an occasion for experience -- for self-expression and self-discovery. 2

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1. D.D. Paige, ed. The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941 (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1951), p.36.
  2. Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience, p.160.

How the central character reveals himself is of course the means by which the poem becomes dramatic -- a character talking to an identifiable listener who may or may not answer him. If the listener remains silent the poem is a dramatic monologue; if the listener speaks to the central character it is a dramatic dialogue. What this suggests is an art which is not so much telling about life as showing life.

Berryman referred to this dramatic mode as a discovery of pronouns, an "invention" which enabled him to write the bulk of his work; pronouns are important, he said, "she matters, he matters, it matters, they matter."<sup>1</sup> This "invention" of pronouns is not simply a matter of "putting people together"; it is a matter of a central character's being given an occasion to express or reveal levels of his experience with others and to involve the reader without addressing him didactically. In considering the whole of Berryman's poetry, we may determine three dramatic modes in which the central character reveals himself. The first mode is, strictly speaking a dramatic monologue: the central character, who may or may not resemble the poet, speaks for himself. Berryman's most sustained effort in this mode was in the early "Nervous Songs" (1948) in which a young woman, a "demented priest," a young Hawaiian, a professor, a captain, a tortured girl, a bridegroom, a man "forsaken and obsessed," and a pacifist, each speaks his "song." Berryman seems to have abandoned the dramatic monologue after these "Songs" until his last volume Delusions, Etc. (1972) ("Old Man Goes South Again Alone," "Navajo Setting the Record Straight," and the final poem "King David Dances"). In Berryman's second dramatic mode, the central character, presumably the poet, but the reader cannot be sure, observes and reacts to one or several people. He may simply and coolly observe someone, as a boy learning the "epistemology of loss" in "The

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1. Berryman, "One Answer to a Question," p.126.

Ball Poem" or he may watch two lovers "glance in passing" at "The Statue" of a famous person, or he may react more passionately as in "Parting as a Descent": "I saw you turn away/And vanish, and the vessels of my brain/Burst...." The third dramatic mode, which Berryman favored most, borrows something from the first two and extends them. The central character, who very much resembles John Berryman, speaks directly to some identifiable person. The major character may enter into a dialogue, as in Homage to Mistress Bradstreet and The Dream Songs, or he may speak to someone who does not answer as in "Eleven Addresses to the Lord" and "Opus Dei."

This device of dramatic voices enabled Berryman, Mark Schorer observes, "to put his desperation outside himself, to objectify it up to a point and thus deal with it.... If at last the device did not save the poet, it saved his poetry."<sup>1</sup> Berryman's poetry is "saved" because he did not simply deal with private desperation; Schorer goes on to quote Mark Van Doren's broader and more accurate evaluation of Berryman's dramatic mode:

He was able to say all that he saw, thought, felt, imagined and understood. In other words, he had broken through into his own deepest recesses, a region where few poets or writers of any kind every come, and where he was free to be as witty, as serious, as ribald, as tender, as tough, as terrible, as downright funny as he pleased. 2

Just as Shakespeare's characters break with Aristotelian characterization of appropriate action, so all of Berryman's characters (including the one that resembles himself) offend the decorum of Aristotelian rules. Unlike Eliot, who wanted the poet to be "impersonal" (that is outside the poem), Berryman wanted a poetry in which the poet's "personality is the point." Even when the poem enacts someone else's point of view, we have a particular perspective towards life which reflects the poet's sympathy

1. Mark Schorer, "The Lonely Calm" The Atlantic Vol.232 (August 1973), p.92.

2. Ibid.

or judgement of that character so that the poet is never divorced completely from his poem. The poet's experiences and his interaction with others are important simply because they are expressions and creations of a personality. When Berryman said that the critics had been "blinded by the 'impersonality' of the poet" in Pound's Cantos, he seems to have not only set out to disprove Eliot's notion as a principle for the Cantos but also to affirm the notion of the "personality-as-subject" which was becoming a major principle in his own poetry.

It follows that if Berryman wanted to show life in his art, if he wanted to bring dramatically his own or someone else's experience and personality to life, then he could not arrange experience into a logical, structured plot. Our experience does not unfold logically. Simply stated, both short and long dramatic poems would follow no plot, but that is to oversimplify. Again we must return to Shakespeare. Berryman learned from Shakespeare, he said, to "put people together in action and see what happens."<sup>1</sup> As in Shakespeare's plays, the design of a dramatic poem which draws upon experience must by definition be incomplete and ragged. "Truth uncompromisingly told," Melville says near the end of Billy Budd's story, "will always have its ragged edges." So it is with experience. Shakespeare's plays were to the Romantics the most accomplished example of this truth, a principle which was the model for their long poems of experience as Peter Conrad recognizes:

Plan is replaced for the romantics by proliferation: their long poems grow in an exploratory, self-modifying, tentative, essentially incoherent fashion, uncertainly edging forward from one mode of being to another; and Shakespeare is made the great exemplar for this for he follows, as Pushkin said, no rule but that of inspiration. 2

Taken as a whole, Shakespeare's plays enact the maximum amount of inspired activity. Whether or not he was interested in revealing or creating his

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1. Lunegaard, "Song of a Poet," p.2 (My italics).
  2. Peter Conrad, The Victorian Treasure-House (London: Collins, 1973), p.14.

own personality has been open to debate. The battle over the question has not been entirely resolved, nor is it likely to be. But perhaps the question of Shakespeare's personality and impersonality are compatible, a paradox in which he reveals himself and yet remains above his work: "it is possible," A.E. Lussky argues of Schlegel's view of Shakespeare, "that the literary qualities of 'objectivity' and 'interestedness' are not incompatible, so that a modern writer may at the same time be in, and aloof from, his own dramas."<sup>1</sup> As I shall argue when we come to Keats's "piercing notion" of the chameleon poet, this is precisely what Berryman manages in his own poetry.

To speak of poetry as "the life we all lead" or as a "process of art and a process of life" or of a poetry in which "personality is the point" is to speak of an art which depicts real experience. We are faced with not so much a verisimilitude but a mimesis of manner in which the real is suggested through the medium of words in order to give the reader a sense of the real. One may argue on linguistic grounds that the real sifted through the medium of words is not the real at all. But it may also be argued that if the words produce the effect of the real in the reader then that real experience has been mediated and recreated. In this view, words are not merely things but valuable in that they set experience into motion. The poetry of experience, therefore, may be said to enjoy a double advantage, for what the words do, generally, is to enact experience. The poem does not formulate the idea, that would "dispel the mystery" as Langbaum says of the poetry of experience. The poetry of experience, he argues, is

a perception that advances in intensity to a deeper and wider, a more inclusive mystery. The sudden advance in intensity [in Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight" and Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey"] gives a dynamic effect, a sense of movement, of the moving, stirring life of mystery. It is the whole purpose of the poem [in "Frost at Midnight"], its way of meaning to give

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1. Cited by M.H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp, p.239.

just this apprehension of life, to transform knowledge into experience. 1

In one sense all poetry is the poetry of experience for the reader in that he works with and sets the words into motion as he reads and thinks about them. But then there must be a consideration of what the words say; do the words transform, we must ask ourselves, "knowledge into experience" or "experience into knowledge"? In the symbolic method, returning to Berryman's rejection of Yeats, the symbol refines experience into knowledge; the poet's apprehension of life seems formulated rather than incomplete. Like Shakespeare, Keats and the Romantics in general, Berryman believed that the poem should not end in formulation; any knowledge the poet possesses should have the ragged edges of speculation, the very "life we all lead."

The source available to the dramatist of life, then, is the same source available to the dramatic poet, his experience in "the life we all lead." The dramatic poet creates a character in a similar way to that of the dramatist. Both enjoy the advantage of perspective that experience does not allow, but the means available to the dramatist (or dramatic poet) are still, Berryman said, "similar to what happens in life":

... we know people, perhaps, chiefly by their voices -- their individual, indescribable, unmistakable voices -- and the creation of an individual tone for each of his major characters is of course one of the clearest signs of a good playwright. In this particular strength Shakespeare is agreed peerless. But the playwright has two immense advantages over life -- "clumsy life," as Henry James put it, "about its stupid work." Even when someone wants to reveal himself to another person, he is usually not very good at it, and probably most people spend most of their lives in self-concealment; but self-revelation is a large part of the creation of the dramatic character. Moreover, in life we seldom enjoy really informed, highly focused comment by others on the person who interests us; and this in drama is the rest of the essence -- unless we add that significant action plays at least as striking a role in revelation of character in drama as it does in life, while insignificant distracting

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1. Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience, p.46.

action is excluded altogether, enforcing a kind of concentration very rare in ordinary experience. 1

In Berryman's long dramatic poems, especially the "clumsy life" of The Dream Songs, he relied upon these same dramatic principles; tone of voice and self-revelation were no less the properties of the dramatic poet. And he relied upon the dramatist's distancing from his subject, Berryman said of Henry, "he doesn't enjoy my advantages of supervision; he just has vision.... He thinks that if something happens to him, it's forever; but I know better."<sup>2</sup> John Bayley has observed that "part of the sophistication" of The Dream Songs is "to involve us in itself not only through the presentation of life in utter disarray... but through a certain implied conspiracy of worldliness with us -- poet and reader are not taken in by life, they know the score."<sup>3</sup> While this may be true, it is also true to say that through knowing the score we are taken in as well; we are taken in by and through complex rhythms; we are taken in by the use of ambiguous pronouns ("where I am/we don't know" The D.S. II, 287); and we are taken in the same way the Greeks were taken by Oedipus, through dramatic irony. We might "know the score" as we do in Hamlet, but in Henry's tumultuous eleven years we do have a sense of a real personality living, lechering, lamenting, and loving; we know Henry by his "individual, indescribable, unmistakable" voice.

- v. "The Hateful Siege of Contraries"<sup>4</sup> and the Condition of "Negative Capability"

I by-passed Keats in the previous section to see some of Berryman's own tendons fastened to Shakespeare; doing this should have, I believe, not

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1. Berryman, et.al., The Arts of Reading, p.444.
  2. Kostelanetz, "Conversation with Berryman," p.341.
  3. John Bayley, "The Self as an Available Reality," The Uses of Division: Unity and Disharmony in Literature (London: Chatto & Windus, 1976), p.164.
  4. Forman, ed. Letters, p.216. Keats quotes this line from Milton's Paradise Lost, IX, 121-122.

only revealed that Shakespeare was Berryman's exemplar, but also strongly suggested that Berryman and Keats followed many of the same paths and arrived at the same destinations. We might regard Keats as a sort of mediator between Berryman and Shakespeare. To some extent Keats was to Shakespeare as Aristotle was to Sophocles: while we value the works of Shakespeare and Sophocles, we so highly respect Keats and Aristotle's perceptive criticism that we look to them to help steady our understanding. Keats's insights, in his Letters, into Shakespeare's drama were so similar to his own poetic principles that to know the principles of one is to know the principles of the other. After a long study and "many attempts," John Middleton Murry in his book on Keats and Shakespeare reached this very conclusion: "... Keats was potentially, at least, our greatest poet after Shakespeare and the only poet who is like Shakespeare..."<sup>1</sup> But perhaps this is being too ingenious: let us say simply that Shakespeare's set of principles for poetry and drama "gets expression," to use Berryman's phrase, in Keats's Letters and that Berryman found these principles useful.

To base poetry upon the life we all lead, as Berryman, Keats, and Shakespeare did, is a formidable, even wrenching task. It is admirable that Keats would want to transform knowledge into experience ("Nothing ever becomes real, till it is experienced -- Even a Proverb is no proverb to you till your Life has illustrated it."<sup>2</sup>), but it places the complete responsibility upon the poet himself. "With given material," Goethe advised Eckermann, "all goes easier and better. Facts and characters being provided, the poet has only the task of animating the whole."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Murry felt that if he had not discovered Keats's insights he would never have really come to terms with Shakespeare ("Shakespeare was, for many years, far too big for me to comprehend"). See John Middleton Murry, Keats and Shakespeare (Oxford University Press, 1926), pp.4-7.
  2. Forman, ed. Letters, p.318.
  3. Eckermann, Conversations of Goethe, pp.19-20.

The other extreme would be to rely on inspiration and seek what happens, but, "no rule but that of inspiration" may be a merciless taskmaster; "you're at the mercy of the notion of sustained inspiration,"<sup>1</sup> Berryman said of The Dream Songs. The poet works as all of us do, in the dark; kindly and malevolent forces alternately aid and batter us; we live in near suffocating circumstances as Keats says, "there is nothing stable in the world; uproar's our only musick."<sup>2</sup> While Berryman and Keats felt that "uproar" is man's true condition, they also believed that the formless and unstable landscape may somehow be given expression and brought round by the poet. Keats says that he pursues "the same instinctive course as the veriest human animal you can think of"; he writes "at random -- straining after particles of light in the midst of a great darkness -- without knowing the bearing of any one assertion of any one opinion."<sup>3</sup> Berryman indexed this quotation and underscored the page number; he put it under the category of "POETRY," significantly one of two categories he capitalizes (the other being "ART"). Throughout his own poetry this same condition of a terrible darkness threatens to swallow him up, "the inexhaustible prospect of night," (T.D. p.44, p.46), he says in an early poem, in which he, like Keats, strains after particles of light. There seem to be particles of light somewhere, Berryman says in another early poem: "The fireflies and the stars our only light..." (T.D. p.19). The best sustained example of what this search in the dark demands is Henry's in The Dream Songs. Somewhere near the beginning of his struggle to survive, Henry remembers that there was light one time, but "from the daylight he got maintrackt" (The D.S. II, 49); he complains that "it is very dark here in this groping forth" (The D.S. IV, 99); he "truly worked... but nothing broke all night" (The D.S. III, 65). Somewhere in the darkness pinpoints

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1. Sisson, "My Whiskers Fly: An Interview with John Berryman," p.15.

2. Forman, ed. Letters, p.80.

3. Forman, ed. Letters, p.317.

of light will show the way, he hopes, "soon you'll see the stars/you fevered after" (The D.S. V, 92). But when light does show through it breaks violently about his head, "the jungles flash with light, in some angles dark as midnight" (The D.S. VI, 192); what seems to be light, ironically, is not light at all but "angles dark as midnight." Henry becomes accustomed to the dark, even likes it, it is "lovely" and "cool," but the prospect of "all human pleas... headed for the night" (The D.S. VI, 274) distresses him so much that he cannot accept the possibility. Here in the depths of distress and suffering he somehow finds strength, a strength that comes through bearing the burden of doubt; he himself, not an external light, "brightens with power" and as The Dream Songs ends "the dawn begins" (The D.S. VII, 383).

Throughout The Dream Songs, "any one assertion of any one opinion," to use Keats's phrase, does not illuminate the darkness:

Henry peered quote alone  
as if the worlds would answer to a code  
just around the corner, down gelid dawn....

(The D.S. VII, 285)

Like Keats, who in his self-appointed task followed the "instinctive course of the veriest human animal," "Animal Henry" looks for "gelid dawn" but discovers that he must rely upon his own resources and settle for "brain-& instinct-work": he shapes his long poem, "a salvage operation," "saving the mostly fine, polishing the surfaces" (The D.S. VII, 351), and thus he turns a process of art into a process of life. The process of life is a "salvage operation" for both Berryman and Keats: each seeks after certainties but finds only doubts; instinctively they know that they will find no resolve and salvage what they can. But their instincts, seemed to insist that there must be a home, a resting place, a place of completeness and resolve. "The natural world," Henry observes, "makes sense":

Fish, plankton, bats' radar, the sense of fish  
 who glide up the coast of South America  
 and head for Gibraltar.  
 How do they know its there? We call this instinct  
 by which we dream we know what instinct is....

(The D.S. VI, 233)

Henry's instinct "flounders" and "strains"; the question begins to  
 formulate, if the fish knows his destination why can't I?

What was the name of that fish?  
 So better organized than we are oh.  
 Sing to me that name, enchanter, sing!

(The D.S. VI, 233)

But the enchanter, whoever he or she is, does not, will not answer; no  
 matter what Henry's instinct tells him, he finds no final peace of  
 resolution.

We normally think of instinct as a physical response, something  
 hereditary, natural, and unalterable, something which prompts reactions  
 below the conscious level. But because both Berryman and Keats wanted  
 to "make sense" of things they really mean "intuition" rather than  
 "instinct." We think of intuition as that power of apprehension of  
 direct knowledge, a knowledge which instantaneously comes about without  
 rational thought, a flash of insight, something we associate with the  
 mind rather than physical response. They were attempting to charge the  
 mind with some of the sureness of instinct, to be like the fish which  
knows automatically that Gibraltar is there, to intuit with assurance  
 and to apprehend with the same natural response that instinct compels.  
 Mind and body are not so simply compressed into one; indeed, they are  
 the source of "the hateful siege of contraries," a siege of the physical  
 and the mental, a siege of the natural and the fabricated, a siege of  
 subjective and objective, a siege of irrationality and rationality.  
 Keats would long for "a life of sensations rather than thoughts!"<sup>1</sup> but

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1. Forman, ed. Letters, p.68.

five months later he would say "there is but one way for me -- the road lies through application study and thought."<sup>1</sup> Even in the letter in which Keats longed for "a life of sensations rather than thoughts," he realized the vitality of contraries, and he desired to "exist partly on sensation, partly on thought."<sup>2</sup>

To recognize the contraries of body and mind, however, does not resolve them; so Keats probes deeper and weighs up the benefits of each:

The difference of high Sensations with and without knowledge appears to me this -- in the latter case we are falling continually ten thousand fathoms deep and being blown up again without wings and with all the horror of a bare shouldered creature -- in the former case, our shoulders are fledged, and we go through the same air without fear. This is running one's rig on the score of abstract benefit -- when we come to human life and the affections it is impossible to know how a parallel of breast and head can be drawn.... It is impossible to know how far knowledge will console us for the death of a friend and the "ill that flesh is heir to." 3

The "parallel of breast and head" cannot be drawn; but then neither does one exist without the other, as Henry realizes: "'His Majesty, the Body' Kafka wrote/a terrible half truth" (The D.S. VI, 247). Just as Keats speculates on "how far knowledge will console us for the death of a friend" so Henry finds little comfort in knowledge when his friend Delmore Schwartz dies. Henry's "Ten Songs; one solid block of agony" (The D.S. VI, 157), enact the impossibility ("when we come to human life and the affection") of knowledge offering any consolation. Henry's feelings make stronger demands than any amount of consoling knowledge:

Henry's mind grew blacker the more he thought.  
He looked onto the world like the act of an aged whore.  
Delmore, Delmore.  
He flung to pieces and they hit the floor. 4

(The D.S. VI, 147)

The mind questions and strains after knowledge of what happens, what happened:

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1. Forman, ed. Letters, p.134.
  2. Forman, ed. Letters, p.68.
  3. Forman, ed. Letters, pp.140-141.
  4. Peter Stitt cited these lines as Shakespearean and Berryman agreed. See Stitt, "The Art of Poetry: An Interview with John Berryman," p.182.

There are all the problems to be sorted out,  
the fate of the soul, what it was all about  
during its being....

(The D.S. VI, 156)

The most that the mind can do is to remember the man and in remembering the man he bases thought upon experience. Henry will take comfort in the life of the man he knew; others will remember him only through his poetry whereas Henry knew him:

The spirit & the joy, in memory  
live of him on, the young will read his young verse  
for as long as such things go:  
why then do I despair, miserable Henry  
who knew him all so long, for better & worse....

(The D.S. VI, 156)

But in Berryman's poetry and Keats's Letters, knowledge is not entirely rejected in favor of life (nor can life be rejected in favor of knowledge, but life is the more important of the two). Like Berryman's rejecting Yeats because "he knew nothing about life," Keats rejected a poet like Milton who "did not think into the human heart, as Wordsworth has done."<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth was Keats's confrère; he wished to emulate Wordsworth, whose "Genius is explorative of those dark Passages" of the heart: "Here I must think Wordsworth is deeper than Milton."<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, in his Letters, Keats continued to stumble about in the dark, straining after certainties.

In all of this activity of feeling and thinking has instinct or intuition arrived anywhere? Is the object merely to sensitize the nerve ends of instinct and intuition? How does one live in the darkness of "the hateful siege of contraries"? Will a sort of poetic apprehension be satisfactory? Should "man... be content with... a few points to tip the fine Web of the Soul"?<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the fine web held by a few points

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1. Forman, ed. Letters, p.144. In his index Berryman significantly indexes this page only under "Wordsworth."
  2. Ibid.
  3. Forman, ed. Letters, p.103.

is nearer "a certain ripeness of intellect," but does it bring round the contraries? The ideal of the process of bringing round contraries would be to find some sort of chemical which would make all opposites, all "disagreeables evaporate": "The excellence of every Art," Keats claimed, "is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate...."<sup>1</sup> (Shakespeare is never far from his mind: "Examine King Lear', and you will find this [Intensity] exemplified throughout....")<sup>2</sup> While intensity might be the ideal, how is it accomplished in a poem? Style? Form? Character? Action? Keats's example of King Lear does not help much towards understanding this dynamic poise. The essential point, nevertheless, is implicit in Keats's statement about the intensity of art: the hateful siege of contraries (disagreeables) might be driven off (evaporate) in the chemistry of intensity so that only the pure, agreeable essence remains. In the same letter, Keats picks up the word "capable," significantly, since becoming "capable" is the point of the process of bringing round the contraries. Keats now describes not so much a moment, i.e. method of art, or a process of straining after particles of light, as he describes a condition, a condition of "Negative Capability" in which

A man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.... 3

Again, Shakespeare hovers about, for he is that "Man of Achievement" who "possessed so enormously" Negative Capability. As with Keats's principle of intensity, Negative Capability is defined more as an aid to knowledge than as a conclusive certainty. We are given a paradox, an affirmation of uncertainty, something described as a negative but which is really positive. Two elements in the definition, doubt and reason, are familiar enough; the new third element carries with it the emphasis hinted at in the intensity principle, "capable of being." To be "capable

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1. Forman, ed. Letters, p.71. Berryman copies down in his index only the fragment "intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate."
  2. Ibid.
  3. Forman, ed. Letters, p.72.

of being" means that a strength must be developed, as Henry does when he gathers strength in his will to survive and his acceptance of uncertainty. In fact, living with and bearing the burden of doubt is the only thing that does make sense. Henry's friend says, unhelpfully, "We hafta die./That is our 'pointed task. Love & die," and Henry replies

Yes; that makes sense.

But what makes sense between, then? What if I  
roiling & babbling & braining, brood on why and  
just sat on the fence?

(The D.S. II, 36)

"I doubts you did or do," Henry's friend replies, "De choice is lost." The choice is lost; the hateful siege of contraries forces Henry off the fence. The most Henry can do is learn to live with it, to accept uncertainty and get on with living, loving, and dying. Perhaps God is there, Berryman says elsewhere, perhaps He is not: "If I say Thy name, art Thou there?" But he accepts the uncertainty, "It may be so" (L. & F., p.87).<sup>1</sup> The notion of Negative Capability may not bring round the contraries, but it enables one to accept what cannot be resolved.

What holds true for the poet holds true for the reader. If the process of poetry cannot succeed in imposing goals and solutions for the poet, in turn, poetry may do no more for the reader. The poem or poems veer away from pre-established solutions; "Poetry should surprise by a fine excess," Keats says, "and not by Singularity."<sup>2</sup> To Keats, "Singularity" meant an overbearingness; a "singular" poem would not "strike the Reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts" but impose upon the reader the poet's conclusion, which by definition he cannot draw anyway; if the poet arrives at a firm conclusion he becomes an example of the "egotistical

1. Ernest C. Stefanik draws attention to what would seem Kierkegaard's version of Negative Capability (neither Stefanik nor Kierkegaard mention Keats however): "Kierkegaard asserts that the transition from unfaith to faith is not a weighing of possibilities: "Christianity is the precise opposite of speculation..., the miraculous, the absurd, a challenge to the individual to exist in it, and not to waste his time by trying to understand it speculatively." "A Cursing Glory," Renascence, Vol.25 (1973), pp.120-21.
2. Forman, ed. Letters, p.108.

sublime," which Keats rejected in Wordsworth. "Singularity" would make the reader "content" when poetry should leave the reader "breathless." "We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us," Keats said; poetry should be "unobtrusive," the only word from this letter which Berryman included in his index. Berryman seemed to agree that the poem must not assert so stubbornly that "if we do not agree, [it] seems to put its hand in its breeches pockets."<sup>1</sup> Evidently Leigh Hunt in conversation had that overbearing and tiresome habit of impressing his opinions upon his listeners. In his index, Berryman notes only one reference to Hunt, but the page he cites best describes Keats's view of this "pleasant" but "egotistical" fellow: in short, Hunt does not give "other minds credit for the same degree of perception as he himself possesses."<sup>2</sup> As an "unforgettable teacher," Berryman has been described as "arrogant before those who searched for answers rather than questions"; arrogance was the only side some seem to see in him, a kind of Leigh Hunt. But there was the Keatsean side to Berryman, the side that was "humble before those who chose to question."<sup>3</sup> ("I don't matter" and 'I MATTER!' are equally boring,"<sup>4</sup> Berryman said.) He believed, in Goethe's words, that "man is born not to solve the problems of the universe, but to find out where the problem begins, and then to restrain himself within the limits of the comprehensible."<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Berryman's poetry enacts that open-endedness, that same quality that allows the reader the "same degree of perception he himself possesses." This is not to say that Berryman's poetry offers the reader a mindless gibberish of uncommitted feelings and inconclusive speculations. Although he does not expect to find answers, the penetration and breadth to which he takes the reader offers

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1. Forman, ed. Letters, p.108.

2. Forman, ed. Letters, p.252.

3. Arlene P. Cardozo, "John Berryman: Unforgettable Teacher" Chicago Sun-Times, May 21, 1972, p.2.

4. Howard, "Whisky and Ink, Whisky and Ink," p.68.

5. Eckermann, Conversations of Goethe, p.161.

something more than a frustrated plea of "I'll never know." His poetry is difficult and complex, but difficulty invites the reader to experience the struggle and thereby increase his strength of Negative Capability; he, too, may become "capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries and doubts," Berryman's difficulty may be his style or allusions or simply pronouns, as he says of The Dream Songs:

They [the pronouns] slide, and the reader is made to guess who is talking to whom. Out of this ambiguity arises richness. The reader becomes more aware, is forced to enter into himself. 1

The reader, then, even in the small matter of pronouns participates in "the life we all lead"; the poet has not "marshalled" and "ticketed" everything for him.

Implicit throughout this section has been the assumption that the general condition of modern man is a "hateful siege of contraries":

"I don't try to reconcile anything" said the poet at eighty,  
'This is a damned strange world'."

(L. & F., p.85)

So it was for Ralph Hodgson at eighty;<sup>2</sup> so it has been for most writers since the generation of 1914. In a collection of essays entitled Negative Capability (1969), Nathan A. Scott, Jr. perceives in contemporary literature an acceptance that "any reaching after fact or reason" will not suffice. After the "rage for order" (such writers as Yeats, Eliot, Lawrence, Kafka, Joyce, and Brecht), there came the writers who "do not reach irritably after any great counterpoise to chaos":

... today we do, indeed, find ourselves in a period in which the primary quality of "the men of achievement" -- of a Beckett, or Robbe-Grillet, a Grass, a Burroughs, a Godard -- appears to be Negative Capability, for they represent, generally, a firm disinclination to transfigure or try to subdue or resolve what is recalcitrantly indeterminate and ambiguous in the human scene in

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1. Howard, "Whisky and Ink, Whisky and Ink," p.76.
  2. "Good Ralph Hodgson" is mentioned in Dream Song 385. Berryman had quoted these lines in Love & Fame in his "Afterward" to the New American Library Edition, 1965 of Theodore Dreiser's The Titan: "At around eighty, in 'retirement' on an Ohio hillside, thought long dead, he published a splendid new collection and was interviewed. 'I don't try to reconcile anything,' he said. 'This is a damned strange world' "(p.506).

our time.... 1

But it would seem that even those writers like Eliot who were supposed to have found order did in some poems accept a condition of "Negative Capability." For example, this is T.S. Pearce's comment on "Little Gidding," the last of the Four Quartets:

This poem is characterised by a sense of assurance: not the assurance necessarily of understanding, but of faith, of freedom from wondering. It is as if Eliot after a train of speculations similar in intensity to those of Wordsworth and Coleridge has finally reached the condition which Keats describes as Negative Capability.... 2

For the modern writer to rage after, and expect to find, order would be to long for a temperament and assurance more suitable to another time. Berryman, in his 1947 review of The Collected Poems of Sidney Keyes, notes Keyes wrote shortly before he died:

I think I should have been born in the last century in Oxfordshire or Wiltshire, instead of London between two wars, because then I might have been a good pastoral poet, instead of an uncomfortable metaphysical without roots.... All I know is that everything in a vague sort of way means something else, and I desperately want to find out what. 3

A familiar struggle. Perhaps Berryman saw in Keyes his own dilemma, but unlike Keyes, he finally discovered the notion of Negative Capability and his desperation was partially allayed. Like Saul Bellow's Augie March, a novel which Berryman praised highly, Berryman wanted to discover the "axial lines" for living; during their picaresque journeys they both hit upon it: "When striving stops, there they [the axial lines] are as a gift."<sup>4</sup>

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1. Nathan A. Scott, Jr. Negative Capability: Studies in the New Literature and the Religious Situation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), p.xiv.
  2. T.S. Pearce, T.S. Eliot (London: Evans Brothers Ltd., 1967), p.127.
  3. John Berryman, "Young Poets Dead," Sewanee Review, vol.55 (July-September 1947), p.511.
  4. Cited by Scott, p.xiii.

## vi. Keats's "Piercing Notion" of the Chameleon Poet

We have recognized that the poetry of experience imposes a darkness in which the poet stumbles about, and we have discovered that the notion of "Negative Capability" enables the poet to accept contradictions and allows him to move with more assurance in the darkness of his unpredictable experience. This brings us to the pivoting principle of the chameleon poet, that "piercing notion" as Berryman said, for a dramatic poetry in which the poet "is continually in for -- and filling some other Body."<sup>1</sup> We have seen that Berryman stressed this principle of the chameleon poet in his criticism and interviews; his index of Keats's Letters reflects no less an emphasis. In one part of his index, he notes the phrase "It has no character... the camelion [sic] poet"; elsewhere, he triply underlines (he does so only twice in the index) the page reference for the major part of the "camelion poet" letter. But what does the notion of the chameleon poet mean? What does the notion and the drama it suggests, imply for the poet, the poem, and the reader?

It may be argued that Keats's poems are not actually dramatic, that they simply create a rich texture of language and scene. But when we look at his Letters we see that his desire to fuse reality into the words of a poem led him towards a dramatic method. Keats discovered that if he wanted the real in his poetry, if he wanted characters to seem like living characters, not just classical figures, then imagery was not enough (just as "rhythm" was not enough for Berryman's poetics), the dramatic principle of characters interacting would have to be part of his poetic principle. Many of Keats's poems seem dramatic anyway; he often relied upon a situation in which a speaker talks to a listener. Certainly Keats's dominant voice is not what Eliot called the "first voice" of poetry,

1. Forman, ed. Letters, p.228. Forman notes Mr. G. Beaumont's suggestion that Keats may have intended to write "informing" rather than "in" and "for." There might be something in this speculation, but I shall retain the phrase as Berryman quoted it.

that is, "the poet talking to himself -- or to nobody."<sup>1</sup> Keats's voice seems nearer a combination of Eliot's second and third voices, the second being "the voice of the poet addressing an audience" and the third being a dramatic imaginary character "speaking in verse" who addresses another "imaginary character."<sup>2</sup> But Eliot's categories do not bring us quite far enough. In Keats's Odes, for example, we find the poet (not an "imaginary character") addressing and interacting with someone or something else -- Autumn (personified), an object (the poet attempting to participate in the life of the figures on the urn), or a nightingale. In most of Keats's poetry, Patricia Ball observes, "the tone is of one moved to a dramatically reverberant utterance rather than the whisper of private thinking."<sup>3</sup> Even in those poems where no listener may be identified, she says further, Keats "acts as a listener to his own speech"<sup>4</sup> by asking rhetorical questions. Keats's preoccupation with Shakespeare's drama and his own "greatest ambition" to write plays had probably given him the essentially dramatic principle of the chameleon poet, and had Keats lived, he would have no doubt written poems which were more clearly in the dramatic mode. But we must turn to his Letters for a clearer idea of his dramatic principle for poetry.

Several months before he died in Rome, he wrote to John Taylor:

The little dramatic skill I may as yet have however it might show in Drama would I think be sufficient for a Poem. I wish to diffuse the colouring of St. Agnes Eve throughout a Poem in which Character & Sentiment would be the figures of such drapery -- Two or three such Poems if God should spare me, written in the course of the next 6 years, would be a famous gradus ad Parnassum altissimum.... 5

Keats added that this process would "nerve" him to "the writing of a few

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1. T.S. Eliot, "The Three Voices of Poetry," On Poetry and Poets (New York: The Noonday Press, 1961), p.96.
  2. Ibid.
  3. Patricia M. Ball, The Central Self, (London: The Athlone Press, 1968), pp.150-151.
  4. Ibid., p.151.
  5. Forman, ed. Letters, p.140.

fine plays -- my greatest ambition." Nearly two years before, in another letter to Taylor, he had expressed his desire to accomplish his "chief attempt at Drama" by "the playing of different Natures with Joy and Sorrow."<sup>1</sup> In both letters his central concern was with creating characters and with the poet's role in "the playing of different Natures," and he saw these concepts within the framework of drama.

Berryman's interest in Keats's ideas on drama, the poem, and the chameleon poet is apparent in his cluster of three references, which are doubly and triply underlined (i.e. "226 228 440 plans") under the category of "on his Keats's own art."<sup>2</sup> The first of these three page references is to Richard Woodhouse's letter to Keats in which Woodhouse reflects on a conversation he had had with Keats about poetry.<sup>3</sup> Obviously, Woodhouse brooded for a while before he sent his carefully phrased rebuttal. As Woodhouse recalled the argument, "I understood you to say, you thought there was now nothing original to be written in poetry; that its riches were already exhausted, & all its beauties forestalled -- & that you should, consequently write no more."<sup>4</sup> Woodhouse could not accept Keats's misgiving about writing poetry in the early nineteenth century or any time; nor could he, he implies, accept the idea for Keats's sake:

... I most earnestly deprecate your conclusion. For my part I believe most sincerely that the wealth of poetry is unexhausted & inexhaustible -- The ideas derivable from our senses singly and in various combinations with each other store the mind with endless images of natural beauty the Passions life & motion & reflection & the moral sense give additional relief & harmony to this mighty world of inanimate matter. 5

Keats's reply to Woodhouse brings us to the second of Berryman's three references; Keats responded quickly and warmly: "Your letter gave me a great satisfaction; more on account of its friendliness, than any relish

1. Forman, ed. Letters, p.91.

2. See Appendix A.

3. Note that Berryman indexes Woodhouse's letter twice: see the category "his friends! Esp. Woodhouse! 226-7!"

4. Forman, ed. Letters, p.226.

5. Ibid.

of that matter in it which is accounted so acceptable in the 'genus irratible'.<sup>1</sup> Keats is somewhat cagey about whether he was taking Woodhouse's advice and would continue writing or whether he really had not meant what he said. His main concern in the letter was to explain "two principle points" or "indices" about poetry: first, "the camelion poet" and second, his aspiration "to reach as high a summit in Poetry as the nerve bestowed upon me will suffer."<sup>2</sup>

Berryman would have been as sympathetic with Keats's "genus irratible" (compare in Love & Fame, "After all has been said, and all has been said..."<sup>3</sup>) as he seemed to be with Woodhouse's conclusion that poetry gives "relief & harmony to this mighty world of inanimate matter." But Keats's reply to Woodhouse interested Berryman more: after the page reference to Woodhouse's letter, Berryman triply underlined the reference to Keats's reply. I shall return to Keats's chameleon poet letter, but for the moment, I should complete the cluster of Berryman's three references. The third reference I have already noted, that is, Keats's "plans" about writing drama and dramatic poems ("The little dramatic skill I may as yet have... would I think be sufficient for a Poem"<sup>4</sup>).

Berryman's cluster of these three references -- Woodhouse's letter, Keats's reply, and his later statement about his desire to write a dramatic poem -- draw together several important assumptions and conclusions, which help towards explaining Berryman's own poetics. The three references<sup>5</sup> have in common an insistence upon what poetry can and

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1. Forman, ed. Letters, p.227.

2. Ibid.

3. L. & F., p.66.

4. Forman, ed. Letters, p.440.

5. A fourth reference in Berryman's index might be added to this cluster. Under the category of "drama" only one page reference is noted: Keats says that "his chief attempt at Drama" would be "the playing of different Natures with Joy and Sorrow." Forman, ed. Letters, p.91.

should do, what the possibilities are and the direction poetry should take. They give evidence of a passionate involvement in life and the poetry of experience -- from Woodhouse's "ideas derivable from our senses" to Keats's emphasis on "Character & Sentiment." Together they suggest the conclusion that poetry should not tell about life, but rather show the fullness of life, "conceiving an Iago as an Imogen." Finally, they suggest a desire to create oneself in poetry, "the playing of different Natures"<sup>1</sup> until "not myself goes home to myself."<sup>2</sup>

After looking at these three references, perhaps it is clearer that the "siege of contraries" is essential to both the notion of the chameleon poet and the dramatic effect. Opposites make for energy, a tension and interaction which is the very essence of drama and out of which a man may progress -- "Without Contraries," William Blake said, "is no progression."<sup>3</sup> The dramatic poem is set into motion and brought to life in a siege of contraries. Keats could see this in so unlikely a place as a quarrel in the streets: "Though a quarrel in the Streets is a thing to be hated, the energies displayed in it are fine."<sup>4</sup> And then he adds, "This [quarrel] is the very thing in which consists poetry."<sup>5</sup> The notion of the chameleon poet, too, is one of the two "indices" which points the way "into the midst of the whole pro and con."<sup>6</sup>

Of the two "indices" in the midst of contraries, the chameleon poet is the more accessible index. The second index, that of the poet reaching towards the "high summit in Poetry," seems to me the large subsuming category within which the notion of the chameleon poet becomes an expression of that reaching. The concept of the chameleon poet brings with it that element of character which is essential to any drama. Action in time creates and makes a character real, but the length and breadth of

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1. Forman, ed. Letters, p.91.
  2. Forman, ed. Letters, p.228.
  3. William Blake, Complete Writings, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p.149.
  4. Forman, ed. Letters, p.317.
  5. Forman, ed. Letters, p.317.
  6. Forman, ed. Letters, p.227.

a character's action in the world is necessarily restricted in a dramatic poem. As we have seen, the character's "action" in a poem is not simply physical action but the moment of "a fine Suddenness," as Keats says of poetry, an awakening of a fresh response that exceeds algebraic, pre-conceived formulation, a characterization based upon the individual's perception and awareness in a world of flux. Keats and Berryman were interested in enacting the process of individual experience wherein

the observer does not so much learn as become something.  
Each discovery of the external world is a discovery of  
himself, of his identity with and difference from the  
external world. 1

The fullest use of drama in the poem, then, would not simply be the character's interaction with the external world nor simply Pound's moment in which a character reveals himself, significant though his action might be, but the character's significant interaction with the external world over a period of time, his revelation of himself, and the spontaneous extension and creation of himself, one more step towards the creation of an identity.

Before I pursue this concept of the poet's creation of his identity, I should bring forward some of the ideas discussed in previous chapters. Berryman indexed an enlightening cross-reference to "Negative Capability," an important cross-reference which suggests a way of drawing together the threads of the "siege of contraries," "Negative Capability," "the chameleon poet," and the "making of an identity." Berryman's reference is to part of one of Keats's long letters to his brother and sister-in-law; Keats expresses his unhappiness with the "Character" of Charles Dilke:

[Dilke is]... a Man who cannot feel he has an identity unless he has made up his Mind about every thing.... All the stubborn arguers you meet are of the same brood. They never begin upon a subject they have not pre-resolved on. They want to hammer their nail into you and if you turn the point, still they think you are wrong. Dilke will never come at a truth as long as he lives; because he is always trying at it. 2

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1. Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience, p.49.
  2. Forman, ed. Letters, p.426.

This cross-reference suggests that Berryman saw the connection with and the opposition between Dilke and the man of Negative Capability. Keats seems to have regarded Dilke and Hunt's firm cast of mind similarly -- we recall Keats's opinion of Hunt who "does not give other mind's credit for the same degree of perception he himself possesses."<sup>1</sup> Men of Hunt and Dilke's "brood" gave Keats some grief; they engaged in "disquisition," as Keats said of Dilke, rather than "dispute"; they could see no merit in "a quarrel in the streets." Keats's statement about Negative Capability evidently was occasioned by one of Dilke's "disquisitions" which caused several ideas to "dove-tail" in Keats's mind. We have seen in the principle of Negative Capability just what "dove-tailed" in Keats's mind, but in this letter about Dilke, identity has now been included and emphasized, so that the whole expanded concept might be restated: we live in a world of unresolvable contraries; only that man who is "capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries and doubts" can ever know a truth and, most importantly, can ever truly know his identity. Identity, not merely "capable of being," has become the real purpose of the man of Negative Capability. In effect, Keats sees that anyone who creates an identity by being preresolved or by being so forceful as to "drive a nail" into someone else actually creates the illusion of identity. This forceful person might give the appearance of a tidy and solid identity, but he is not; his identity has not been created by himself but by an idea, a formula. Keats perceived identity as less tidy, less forceful, but in the end no less solid: "As various as the Lives of Men are -- so various become their Souls, and thus does God make individual beings...."<sup>2</sup> A sense of identity based upon preconceived notions is an identity formed out of the mind rather than experience; the mind, that faculty responsible for Dilke and Hunt's false sense of identity, may, however, spin out only part of the

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1. Forman, ed. Letters, p.252.

2. Forman, ed. Letters, p.336.

delicate web of the whole and true identity. The short answer is that the mind and heart in interaction with others create identity and that the notion of the chameleon poet encapsulates this process, but we must inquire further into what Keats means by identity.

Identity, Keats believed, is created in a "vale of Soul-making" where souls are "no Souls till they acquire identities."<sup>1</sup> Keats uses the terms "Soul" and "identity" interchangeably, meaning, I take it, that one does not exist without the other. But he makes a very clear distinction between Soul (identity) and intelligence; intelligence, he suggests, may help us perceive but intelligence alone cannot make a soul:

I/n/telligences are atoms of perception -- they know and they see and they are pure, in short they are God -- How then are Souls to be made? ... How, but by the medium of a world like this?<sup>2</sup>

The world we live in, our "vale," makes demands upon not only the mind but also the heart; it is the place where "the proper action of Mind and Heart" may create a soul or identity. The mind and heart encounter the external world "for the purpose of forming the Soul."<sup>3</sup> Keats gives a "homely" but helpful analogy of the interaction and tension generated by these three elements -- the world, heart, and mind:

I will call the world a School instituted for the purpose of teaching little children to read -- I will call the human heart the horn Book used in that School -- and I will call the Child able to read, the Soul made from that School and its hornbook.<sup>4</sup>

The heart becomes the go-between "in the World of Circumstances";<sup>5</sup> the heart, not the mind, loops together inner and outer and is the means by which an identity is created. "Not merely is the Heart a Hornbook," Keats says further, "It is the Minds [sic] Bible, it is the Minds [sic] experience, it is the text from which the mind or intelligence sucks its identity."<sup>6</sup>

Keats's "vale of Soul-making" is traversed in the world of

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1. Forman, ed. Letters, p.336. Berryman indexes this page reference under "'identities'."
  2. Ibid.
  3. Ibid.
  4. Ibid.
  5. Forman, ed. Letters, p.337.
  6. Forman, ed. Letters, p.336.

circumstances where circumstances "are like Clouds continually gathering and bursting"<sup>1</sup> (compare Berryman's version of this in "The Dispossessed," "an evil sky... twirled its mustaches, hissed..." or Henry's version, "the clouds growled, heh-heh, & snapped, & crashed" [The D.S. I, 18]), and sounds similar to Olive Schreiner's drama of "the life we all lead" in which "nothing can be prophesied." The difference between Keats and Schreiner here is that Schreiner is speaking only of a "method of art"; Keats wanted more than a "method of art," he wanted a "system of Salvation" as well, which is of course similar to Berryman's notion of a "process of art and a process of life" and poetry aiming at "the reformation of the poet, as prayer does." When the heart becomes the controlling principle of the poet's poetry, each poem enacts an encounter with the external world and each encounter with the external world gives the poet a chance to project himself "sympathetically into the Other and, by identifying there another aspect of the spiritual Self, to evolve a soul or identity."<sup>2</sup> Henry (Berryman) criticized Housman on this point; he said of Housman's "hopeless lads" and "hopeless heroine":

your creator is studying his celestial sphere,  
he never loved you, he never loved a woman  
or a man, save one....

(The D.S. VI, 205)

Generally in Keats and Berryman's poetry, the speaker's encounter with the external world is a particular kind of encounter, not merely observation, not merely externalization. The speaker begins with the raw material of human experience and self-consciously<sup>3</sup> projects himself into the external world unlike many critics and scholars who will use only their minds to understand The Dream Songs:

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1. Forman, ed. Letters, p.315.
  2. Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience, p.50.
  3. "True selfhood emerges only with self-consciousness, only when the self consciously relates itself with its immediate needs to a reality outside itself." See J. Preston Cole, The Problematic Self in Kierkegaard and Freud (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), pp.68-69.

They'll seek the strange soul, in rain & mist,  
 whereas they should recall the pretty cousins they kissed  
 and stick with the sweet switch of the body.

(The D.S. VII, 308)

Keats's and Berryman's poems of experience are not word objects nor even a mirror of the external world but an expression in words which enacts the struggle of projecting sympathetically, an enactment of the heart, as Keats might say, a special kind of empathic ventriloquism of voice and feeling, rather than a metaphor-like "listening to the Rain with a sense of being drown'd and rotted like a grain of wheat."<sup>1</sup> Out of this projection comes awareness and understanding (the heart is "the minds sic Bible"), but how is this understanding brought about? How is it that Keats can presume to participate in <sup>an</sup> other's experience? When Keats says that "if a Sparrow come before my Window I take part in its existence and pick about the Gravel"<sup>2</sup> or again, "I am with Achilles shouting in the Trenches, or with Theocritus in the Vales of Sicily,"<sup>3</sup> he assumes that what is "out there" or "other" or "not myself" both in present and past time may be shared beyond the sharing of subjectivity. This assumption, and the questions it raises, may be answered in part by Keats's statement about "the poetical Character" in his chameleon poet letter:

The poetical Character has no self -- it is everything and nothing -- It has no character -- it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated -- It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher, delights the chameleon Poet. It does no harm from the relish of the dark side of things any more than from its taste for the bright one; because they both end in speculation. 4

Thus far the description is familiar enough: the "poetical Character" participates in the "gusto" of experience in a world of contraries ("foul or fair, high or low" etc.) which are unresolvable ("end in speculation").

Keats then turns to the problem of identity:

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1. Forman, ed. Letters, p.137.
  2. Forman, ed. Letters, p.69.
  3. Forman, ed. Letters, p.241.
  4. Forman, ed. Letters, p.227-8.

A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity -- he is continually in for -- and filling some other Body -- the Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute -- the poet has none; no identity -- he is certainly the most unpoetical of God's Creatures. 1

The poet is to be "disinterested," as Keats said elsewhere. If this is so, then what about the poet? Where is he in this process? Does he not have an identity? Keats probes deeper:

If he [the poet] has no self, and if I am a Poet, where is the Wonder that I should say I would write no more? Might I not at that very instant have been cogitating on the Characters of Saturn and Ops? It is a wretched thing to confess; but is a very fact that not one word I ever utter can be taken for granted as an opinion growing out of my identical nature -- how can it when I have no nature? 2

It is tempting to interpret Keats literally here and to believe that he had made a statement of hard principle, but I see him in this context cleverly turning an argument. We recall that Woodhouse could not accept Keats's saying that all the riches of poetry "were already exhausted" and that Keats said he would write no more. The turn of Keats's reply seems to be that if he told Woodhouse that he should write no more, then he (Keats) meant it differently from Woodhouse's understanding of it. Keats meant that he himself would write no more, but would instead write "from some character in whose soul I now live."<sup>3</sup> Keats struggled too much with creating his own identity to deny himself a part in the process of making the poem. If there is no sense of the poet John Keats in the poem, we are speaking of a principle of art, but this principle does not abandon the reality of the poet's own identity being created as he "becomes" some character in whose soul he lives.

On the point of the poet's having no part in the poem, Berryman seems to have disagreed, and his own principle of the chameleon poet might

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1. Forman, ed. Letters, p.228.
  2. Forman, ed. Letters, p.228.
  3. Forman, ed. Letters, p.229.

be restated in the following Keatsean terms: the poetical character lives in light and shade; it may nearly participate in others' experience but it is itself too; it has a self and recognizes, through sensitizing awareness, other selves; in the poetical character's attempt to empathize with other selves, it begins to create its own identity.

I have been using the terms "identity" and "self" perhaps too freely; the two terms should be distinguished as complementary but different parts in Berryman's poetics. Keats, on the other hand, uses "identity" and "self" interchangeably; most often he seems to mean the "self" which recognizes its own physical and spiritual person as contrasted with other persons or objects.<sup>1</sup> But Keats did seem to recognize and use the term "identity" as we would use it; when he says, "as various as the Lives of Men are -- so various become their Souls, and thus does God make individual beings,"<sup>2</sup> he means identity ("Soul") and is suggesting that identity, as we refer to it, is a special and complex view of the self -- identity is the uniqueness of the self, the individuality, personal style, and variations of the self. One may be aware of one's self without recognizing an identity, for the discovery of one's identity is determined by one's awareness and understanding of self in time and in relation with others. The individual's sense of identity, Norman Holland says, is made firm by "his awareness of the continuity in the style of his individuality and its existence and the coincidence of his personal style with his meaning for significant others in his immediate community."<sup>3</sup> Each of us has essential characteristics imprinted in infancy; Holland's suggestion is that these essential "unchanging" characteristics imprinted in infancy are "primary identity." What the child becomes, his choices, decisions,

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1. See A Glossary of Psychoanalytic Terms and Concepts, ed. Burness E. Moore and Bernard D. Fine (New York: American Psychoanalytic Association, 1967) where the self is defined as the "real and total person of an individual, including both his body and psyche." Cited by Norman Holland, "Self, Identity, Unity, Wholeness," P.M.L.A., Vol.90 (October 1975), 814.
  2. Forman, ed. Letters, p.336.
  3. Holland, "Self, Identity, Unity, Wholeness," p.814.

relationships, experiences are the variations upon this "primary identity," and these variations are the identity, "the visible human before me, ever changing and different, yet ever continuous with what went before."<sup>1</sup>

This concept of identity is a complex rhythm: the flow, modulations, and variations of individual lives as they relate to other lives are the contours of vitality and the rhythms of lives in historical time.<sup>2</sup>

If we accept the notion that identity may be described as a multiplicity of rhythm in historical time, it becomes apparent that the short poem, because of the constriction of its length, cannot explore an identity. It would not be pressing the generalization too far to say that the short poem is limited to an awareness (or an unawareness) of self ("one's 'own person' as contrasted with 'other persons' and objects outside oneself"); whereas, the long poem opens up the possibility of variations of the self in time and therefore the creation of an identity.

We have now two possibilities, or functions, of the "piercing notion" of the chameleon poet; the short poem, in which the speaker comes to a recognition or awareness of self and the long poem in which the speaker creates an identity. In both the recognition of self and the creation of identity, the heart projects into, interacts, mediates, and connects with the external world. Like the chameleon, the heart seems to change color and dissolve into the thing it clings to, but the chameleon, like the heart, does not truly merge with something outside itself. Try as he may, Keats could not really become the sparrow picking at the gravel or become Achilles in the trenches. Keats did realize this limitation of the chameleon poet: as he says, "I take part"<sup>3</sup> in the sparrow's existence or "I am with Achilles shouting in the trenches"<sup>4</sup> or again, he

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1. Holland, "Self, Identity, Unity, Wholeness," p.815.
  2. See John Macmurray, Persons in Relation (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1961). Note especially the chapter "The Rhythms of Withdrawal and Return," pp.86-105.
  3. Forman, ed. Letters, p.69. (My italics).
  4. Forman, ed. Letters, p.241. (My italics).

expresses in a letter to his friend Benjamin Haydon, "I know not you<sup>r</sup> many havens of intensesness -- nor can I ever know them...."<sup>1</sup> Keats realized, as did Berryman, that the reality of being a chameleon poet takes the poet or the speaker of a poem just to the point of awareness -- both of himself and of Other. If Keats or Berryman had been overly concerned about merging with someone or something else, they would have been lost in the problem that Lawrence and Whitman never solved, namely how does the poet or speaker hold intact his own identity and at the same time merge with someone else? The simple answer is that the poet does not, can not. Both Lawrence and Whitman at times seemed to strain after an essentially mystical union, an activity into which poetry refuses to follow without a recognition that the art of poetry is completely subsumed once something so demanding as mystical union is the goal. Richard Fogle observes an obvious but essential truth about the "mystical" aspect of the chameleon poet: "a mystical union between oneself and other orders of being and consciousness... is on the surface unlikely and in any event wholly unverifiable."<sup>2</sup> But Lawrence recognized in Whitman's "merging" something less mystical than I have allowed:

Meeting all the other wayfarers along the road. And how?  
How meet them, and how pass? With sympathy, says  
Whitman. Sympathy. He does not say love. He says sympathy.  
Feeling with. Feel with them as they feel themselves,  
catching the vibration of their soul and flesh as we pass. <sup>3</sup>

The notion of the chameleon projection into (Einfühlung, or "empathy") is what we are left with, but it is enough to be verifiable and to create a dramatic situation in which the main player enacts his experience of a powerful response, of "catching the vibrations" of other persons or things. It is important to any discussion of the chameleon

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1. Forman, ed. Letters, p.129.
  2. Richard H. Fogle, The Imagery of Keats and Shelley, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1949), p.148.
  3. D.H. Lawrence, "Whitman," Studies in Classic American Literature (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Limited, 1971), p.181.

poet that we recognize the difference between "sympathetic" response and "empathic" response. Empathy creates a sense, by way of the physical senses, of an intimate union with its object. Empathy denotes participation and projection into. Sympathy, too, denotes an imaginative projection but less in the sense of a union. To be in sympathy is to be in accord with, in correlation, or in affinity; to be sympathetic suggests more a sense of fellow-feeling than the participation empathy implies. In short, "sympathy runs parallel, while empathy unites."<sup>1</sup> Empathy may be regarded as a realizable compromise between fellow-feeling and a mystical union; while mystical union means that the individual merges with something in the external world, empathy "permits the closest contact of self and object without loss of identity."<sup>2</sup>

The extraordinary weight that Keats, and all of the Romantics, placed on empathy was no less Berryman's concern. He, too, struggled towards the vital union of poet and subject; he, too, felt the need to participate in the experience of others. Of all the Romantic poets he is most like Keats in his desire to participate in <sup>the</sup> individual's experience rather than in the total landscape, as, say, Byron in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, (IV, clxxvii): "I steal From all I may be, or have been before, To mingle with the Universe."<sup>3</sup> Keats might reply to Byron here: "human nature is finer."<sup>4</sup> Though human nature would be Berryman's concern, he does not always convey to the reader such a strong sense of empathy as Keats does. If empathy is to be verifiable beyond the speaker's saying he is empathic; <sup>there is</sup> the reader must be brought into an empathy with the poet and subject. The primary means the poet has of doing this is through

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1. Alex Preminger, et al. The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, enlarged edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p.222.
  2. Fogle, The Imagery of Keats and Shelley, p.148.
  3. Cited by M.H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp, p.347, n.77. Note also: "Keats was exceptional, in that he felt an identification rather with individual things, such as sparrows and people, than with the total landscape," p.347, n.77.
  4. Forman, ed. Letters, p.111.

rhythm and imagery. No bare factual statement of empathy will suffice; "the hallmark," as Richard Fogle convincingly argues, "by which poetic empathy is to be identified is the presence of motor, kinesthetic, or organic imagery, so powerful in effect as to evoke kindred impulses in the reader."<sup>1</sup> Berryman's poetic empathy, as reflected in the absence of physical imagery in many of his "empathic" poems, seems to suggest the impossibility of a vital, empathic participation. Compare, for example, the kinesthetic imagery of some lines from Keats's "Ode to Psyche" with the static imagery of an early Berryman poem "On the London Train":

/Cupid and Psyche/ lay calm-breathing on the bedded grass;  
Their arms embraced, and their pinions too;  
Their lips touch'd not, but had not bade adieu,  
As if disjoined by soft-handed slumber,  
And ready still past kisses to outnumber....

(11. 15-19)

Despite the lonesome look  
The man in the corner has,  
Across the compartment,  
Doubtless a dozen daze  
Daily their eyes on him intent  
And fancy him beside a brook,  
Their arms with his laced,  
Holding him fast.

(20P, p.52)

In this example from Keats, the physical suggestion, which stirs the reader towards an empathetic response, is "sustained," Fogle observes, "by tactual feelings in 'bedded,' 'embraced,' 'lips touch'd not,' 'disjoined,' and 'soft-handed,'" so that "action is suspended only momentarily."<sup>2</sup> Berryman's description of a "dozen eyes" trying to empathize with "the man in the corner" of a train compartment is just that, a description. Action is suspended throughout, very little physical suggestion to the reader to participate, and the people described in the poem think, they do not feel into. They "fancy" seeing the man in a pastoral setting; the description

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1. Fogle, The Imagery of Keats and Shelley, p.149

2. Ibid., p.164.

of arms, which are "laced" and "holding" does not ask the reader to participate the way Keats's "calm-breathing" "bedded" and "embraced" do. And, too, the poetic device of consonance in each example provokes a different response: Keats's "calm-breathing on the bedded grass;/ Their arms embraced" steadily complements the slow, physical movement of the description; Berryman's "Doubtless a dozen daze/Daily" pounds rather than evokes, we are asked to observe and judge rather than feel and participate. In fairness to Berryman's poem, his intention differs from that of Keats's; Berryman means to convey the sad impossibility of "a dozen" who "daze/Daily their eyes" and who cannot really empathize with the man; as Berryman paraphrases the lines, "Daily as they are afflicted with his image or his presence, the possibilities of union daze them and glaze their eyes."<sup>1</sup> So there is no question of the necessity to evoke empathy in the reader through physical imagery; impossibility and absence are the point. Sympathy is all the reader and the participants in the poem are allowed.

In some of Berryman's poetry, however, the speaker and the reader are inclined towards empathy. A brief comparison of Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and Berryman's "The Ball Poem" points to this inclination and shows how Berryman realizes that he must stop just short of empathy. Fogle argues that "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is "Keats's consummate expression of empathic feeling and thought."<sup>2</sup> As the poem develops, Keats, or the poet-speaker, is drawn into the scenes on the vase. His own questions beckon both himself and the reader into the scenes:

What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?  
 What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?  
 What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

Similarly, "The Ball Poem" opens with the same gesture towards empathy;

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1. John Berryman, "A Note on Poetry" in Five Young American Poets (Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1940), p.45.
  2. Fogle, The Imagery of Keats and Shelley, p.172.

a question, almost stuttering with emphatic repetition, draws the poet-speaker and the reader into the scene:

What is the boy now, who has lost his ball,  
 What, what is he to do? I saw it go  
 Merrily bouncing down the street, and then  
 Merrily over -- there it is in the water!

The repetition of "Merrily" and the strong trochaic rhythm of the ball "bouncing down the street" invite the reader to participate in the movement of the ball. But how much more completely in Keats's ode both the poet-speaker and the reader are drawn into an empathic response; the gestures of empathic repetition are finally displaced by physical imagery:

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed  
 Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;  
 And, happy melodist, unwearied,  
 For ever piping songs for ever new;  
 More happy love! more happy, happy love!  
 For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,  
 For ever panting, and for ever young  
 All breathing human passion far above,  
 That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,  
 A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

Keats empathically moves from the boughs, to the melodist, to the lovers and joins particularly in the lovers' feelings. His method of evoking empathic participation is similar to that of "The Ball Poem," -- repetition complemented by a strong rhythm -- but in Keats's ode we are invited to participate, as he seems to do, more fully than in "The Ball Poem." For a moment in "Ode," action is squeezed into a poise of dynamic stasis; love is rhythmically ecstatic, "more happy love! more happy, happy love!" (complemented by consonance in a bouncing trochaic rhythm of the words "breathing human passion far above") and imagistically sensuous, "warm" "panting," "breathing," "burning," and "parching." The total effect of the strong rhythm and physical imagery is to give a fuller sense of the speaker-poet, who participates and invites the reader to participate. Even the very subtle and small matter of an indefinite article includes the speaker and the reader in the scene. When Keats says, "All breathing human passion," he means "all" of the figures in the scene, but the next

two lines clearly includes all of us -- "a heart high-sorrowful," "a burning forehead," and "a parching tongue."

The poet in "The Ball Poem" realizes very early in the poem that he cannot participate in the boy's feelings. He describes, almost empathically, the boy's sense of loss:

No use to say 'O there are other balls':  
An ultimate shaking grief fixes the boy  
As he stands rigid, trembling, staring down  
All his young days into the harbour where  
His ball went.

The poet's empathy seems nearly complete as he observes the boy's "ultimate shaking grief," a phrase which, as Martin Dodsworth rightly observes, is "too strong for what is shown."<sup>1</sup> As the boy "stands rigid, trembling" the poet's empathy is truncated by the next bald statement: "I would not intrude upon him...." For a brief moment the poet and the reader, perhaps, feel for the boy, but we do not feel into. The boy is Other, he is external like the money which will not replace his particular loss; he is almost symbolic of one's response to another's feeling.<sup>2</sup> The poet stands back and observes the boy's experience:

He is learning, well behind his desperate eyes,  
The epistemology of loss, how to stand up  
Knowing what every man must one day know  
And most know many days, how to stand up  
And gradually light returns to the street,  
A whistle blows, the ball is out of sight....

Again, repetition stands in for empathic imagery, no evocation but a steady empathic repetition. Paradoxically, the repetition of "knowing" punctuates the impossibility of knowing. The poet suggests for both himself and the reader that each of us "knows" only his own experience; he finds it impossible to "know" beyond repeating the word itself, as though he were still trying to convince himself and the reader. The

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1. Martin Dodsworth, "John Berryman: An Introduction," The Survival of Poetry, ed. Martin Dodsworth (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1970), p.108.
  2. Dodsworth says, "It is hard to believe in this boy's real existence...." p.108.

poem ends with a gesture of empathy, but the poet still relies more upon a thumping repetition than the energy of empathic imagery:

Soon part of me will explore the deep and dark  
 Floor of the harbour... I am everywhere  
 I suffer and move, my mind and my heart move  
 With all that move me, under the water  
 Or whistling, I am not a little boy.

(My italics)

Keats came to a similar rational conclusion: near the end of "Ode on a Grecian Urn" he says, "cold pastoral!" and the empathic response is broken. The difference between Keats's response and Berryman's should be apparent: though each tried to describe what he saw and felt, Keats's perception, and in turn, his poetry, participates more fully in what he sees, for a time at least; whereas Berryman feels for what he sees, he catches vibrations and sympathizes at a distance. Like the ironic repetition of "know," the repetition of "move," and the Audenish preciseness of "epistemology of loss" he tries to convince the mind what the heart feels and the heart what the mind knows. "Move" spills over into most of its meanings: to change position, to proceed, to depart, to act, to maneuver, but mostly the poet means to stir feeling and touch the heart. Nevertheless, the rhythms of the empathic process are similar in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and "The Ball Poem": each poem dramatizes a recognition of self ("one's own person as contrasted with other persons"); each discovers and interacts with someone or something in the external world and for a moment, is surprised into awareness of himself and his difference from the external world. In the end, "we are confronted," as Berryman says of "The Ball Poem," "with a process of life and a process of art."

The two poems by Berryman which I have discussed thus far are early poems (the early 1940's), but the principle of the chameleon poet was to remain Berryman's major principle throughout his poetry, from the "union" with Mistress Bradstreet, through Henry's "extraordinary talent for becoming the people and things he likes,"<sup>1</sup> to "Eleven Addresses to

1. Howard, "Whisky and Ink, Whisky and Ink," p.70.

the Lord":

Now, brooding thro' a history of the early Church  
I identify with everybody, even the heresiarchs.

(L. & F., p.89)

"Couvade" has often been cited as "Henry's favorite custom" (The D.S. V, 124).<sup>1</sup> (Couvade "refers to the custom among some tribes of the father's going to bed and re-enacting the pains of his wife's birth labor.")<sup>2</sup> But "couvade" denotes participation, and as we have seen, Berryman does not invite himself nor the reader, to participate in another's experience, but rather, he enacts a sympathetic response. Though Henry would wish for couvade to be his favorite custom, he seems predestined to never accomplish it. When, for example, a student weeps in Henry's office, he weeps too:

'go right ahead,' I assure -  
ed her, 'here's a handkerchief. Cry! She did, I did  
when she got control, I said 'what's the matter -  
if you want to talk?'  
'Nothing. Nothing's the matter.' So.  
I am her.

(The D.S. VI, 242)

The poetry here suggests that Henry is sympathetic, not empathic. As the poet in "The Ball Poem" cannot intrude, so Henry cannot intrude; he can only listen "so"; "I am her," while sympathetic, is a helpless protesting. He realizes that he is helpless in abating or absolving someone else's misery. Near the end of The Dream Songs, in a poem impersonally but ironically entitled (in Yeatsian fashion) "His Helplessness," a young lady, who is "thousands of miles" away, writes to Henry that she is miserable. Henry says that he "would offer" to help, for she "needs one to pace her fate," but he "cannot spot a hole"; he feels sympathetic but helpless:

1. For a discussion of "couvade" see Michael Berryhill, "The Epistemology of Loss" in John Berryman: A Checklist, ed. Richard J. Kelly (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1972), pp.xxviii-xxix.
2. Ibid., p.xxviii.

I look with my heart, in her darkness over there:  
dark shroud the clouds on her disordered soul  
whose last letter flew like a prayer.

(The D.S. VII, 375)

Though Henry, or any other character in Berryman's poetry, cannot participate in others' experience, though the reader may be not invited to participate in others' experience either, there is a sense in which John Berryman, the man himself, participates in others' experience. Douglas Dunn, who in his own poetry reflects an awareness that the poet is "a camera" ("They suffer, and I catch only the surface"<sup>1</sup>), sees in Berryman's poetry, especially The Dream Songs, not only sympathy but also empathy; but in this case an empathy of author and subject. "Henry," he speculates, "is not Berryman, but Berryman is Henry":

[Henry]... is produced imaginatively, by a process in which psychological and imaginative necessities are satisfied together, not only as a cipher, or mask, through which Berryman can speak, but as, if you like, a "poet's friend." Out of his real self, Berryman drew another person who is intuitively,... as like the real Berryman as makes no difference.

Whether this process results in a creation that can be called a "literary device" is questionable. It appears to be more personal, more to do with the nature of the poet's mind, and the consolations it needs to compensate for solitude and the nature of what he knows about himself. It could also be said to be fundamental in a poetry in which the self is exploited through imaginative recreations.... 2

The question of whether this process of recreation is personal and autobiographical seems to cut two ways: on the one hand, it does compensate for the poet's solitude -- he has "a friend" -- but on the other, it helps authenticate the experience of perceiving the self and gives a sense of a spontaneous experience rather than an inevitable, preconceived solution.

As I have noted, when Berryman was asked, "of what use do you think art is in the moral world?" he replied, "It depends on what you take

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1. Douglas Dunn, "I Am a Cameraman" Love or Nothing (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1974), p.41.
  2. Dunn, "Gaiety & Lamentation," pp.73-4.

the end of life to be; whether it issues in conduct or feelings."<sup>1</sup> Though we recognize that the poet manipulates and selects his subject, we are asked to believe that art issues in feeling and sympathy so as to affect our conduct: "Never have I known a really, vain arrogant man to transform himself into a decent human being,"<sup>2</sup> Berryman said; or once again, poetry "aims... at the reformation of the poet, as prayer does... it enables the poet gradually again and again, to become almost another man, but something of that sort happens, on a small scale, a freeing, with the creation of every real poem."<sup>3</sup> This last statement, with the poet at the center of activity, might seem at first reading an egocentric self-creation; on the contrary, the reformation of the poet is brought about by his sympathetic response to others. And, further, the purpose of the sympathetic response is not simply the poet's egotistical confirmation, the purpose is awareness both of himself and others, and in this the reader is invited to participate. Henry learns in his long odyssey that "awareness was most of what he had" (The D.S. VII, 370); he had slowly learned awareness through his interaction with others so that when a woman, who suffers from "an inability to respond" (The D.S. VII, 358) comes to him for counsel, he understands. That Berryman's imagery does not always draw the reader, and his rhythm often does, into participating in others' experience, does not require us to regard Berryman as the lesser poet. What Berryman says in a notation on his copy of Eliot's Four Quartets might be taken as his own avowed purpose: "Preston rightly says, 'There is no claim to share the experience of the saint, the purpose is awareness."<sup>4</sup> Whether one identifies <sup>the experience of</sup> with a saint or a miserable soul, a distraught student or a man on a London train, awareness is always the essential point.

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1. Berg, "A Truly Gentle Man Tightens and Paces," p.17.
  2. Howard, "Whisky and Ink, Whisky and Ink," p.58.
  3. Berryman, "The Revolving Bookstand," p.386.
  4. This notation appears on the back cover page of Berryman's copy of T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1943).

In emphasizing the efforts of the poet or speaker to develop his awareness, I have not intended to underplay the reader's role in the same demanding effort. Berryman's demands weigh heavily upon the reader. His deliberate disruption of syntax, his almost wilful delight in wrenching language, or his ambiguous pronouns in The Dream Songs where "the reader is made to guess who is talking to whom" are all risky maneuvers, but in all cases there is an open invitation to the reader to collude with the poet, to mend together the pieces and create with the poet.<sup>1</sup> In an age of mass media and an American public all too ready to live on a steady diet of the sunny little digests that infest our book stores, asking the reader to perceive beyond his customary, automatic response, is asking him to attempt to develop a deeper intuitive response. If the reader participates in the process he should begin to realize something more important than absolute meaning; out of this process comes an energy of mind which issues in feeling and a sensitivity of response. Many modern poets have lamented the lack of awareness in our age. In 19th century England Matthew Arnold saw this loss of awareness and gave warning. Like Berryman and Keats, he found in Wordsworth a confrère and implored his readers to listen to Wordsworth's poetry and to "feel his voice":

... where will Europe's latter hour  
 Again find Wordsworth's healing power?  
 Others will teach us how to dare,  
 And against fear our breast to steel;  
 Others will strengthen us to bear  
 But who, ah! who will make us feel? 2

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1. The reader's role in creating with the poet was no less a Romantic principle, as John Bayley says, "... in early Romantic poetry the probing process of the poet's imagination depends for its success upon the full co-operation of the reader in the same voyage of discovery." The Romantic Survival (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), p.31. And, too, Browning seems to have relied upon the reader to reconstruct his "grotesque" style; Browning's poems "throw words outwards, leaving a litter of linguistic wreckage for the reader to reconstruct...." See Isobel Armstrong, "Browning and the 'Grotesque' Style" in The Major Victorian Poets: Reconsiderations Isobel Armstrong, ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), pp.93-94.
  2. Matthew Arnold, The Complete Poems of Matthew Arnold, ed. Kenneth Allott (London: Longmans, Green and Co.Ltd., 1965), p.229.

Eliot bears the legacy in an even bleaker view of awareness in The Waste Land, but out of the waste land come the same voices of hope, the same expression of the necessity to feel: Datta, Dayadhvam, Danyata ("Give, Sympathize, Control"). Berryman seemed to find in the principle of the empathic chameleon poet the voice of hope which came out of the waste land. Keats observed of his concept of the "vale of soul-making," that he had found "a faint sketch of a system of Salvation which does not affront our reason and humanity." So it was with Berryman; Douglas Dunn is right, "what must be asserted about Berryman's work is its humanity."<sup>1</sup>

#### vii. The World of Pains and Troubles

Awareness and sympathy, the matured yield of the notion of the chameleon poet, are desirable, even noble, ideas. When awareness and sympathy are awakened in an individual, he begins to create a sense of his own identity, and when awareness and sympathy underpin societies, they should be more humane and sensitive to human needs. The history of poetry tells us we have good reason to believe that our artists are, in Ezra Pound's phrase, "the antennae of the race"; artists feel more intensely and see more completely, though not necessarily differently, than most of us; their view of the world we live in should tell us something about our world and about our relationship with it.

Berryman and Keats saw the external world as brutish, chaotic and painful, an intuition similar to Thomas Hardy's feeling: "These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown/Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain." Going further than -- or not so far as? -- Hardy's view of the haphazard ("Hap") nature of man's fate, Keats saw pain as an inevitability, a blight like the certainty of Adam and Eve's tasting the forbidden fruit:

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1. Dunn, "Gaiety & Lamentation," p.72.

This is the world -- thus we cannot expect to give way many hours of pleasure -- Circumstances are like Clouds continually gathering and bursting -- While we are laughing the seed of some trouble is put into the wide arable land of events -- while we are laughing it sprouts it grows and suddenly bears a poison fruit which we must pluck.... 1

Keats also felt that English society abetted the poet's suffering, but he felt too that English neglect produced better poets: "One of the great reasons that the English have produced the finest writers in the world is, that the English world has illtreated them during their lives and foster'd them after their deaths."<sup>2</sup>

Keats's view of suffering, then, is a secular version of felix culpa, suffering may be, and in fact was to Keats's mind, fortunate for the individual. Like Shakespeare, that "miserable and mighty Poet of the human Heart,"<sup>3</sup> or Wordsworth, who was "brave enough to volunteer for uncomfortable hours,"<sup>4</sup> Keats felt that suffering infused man with humanity, and that suffering was indispensable and inevitable for that man who thought much about his relationship with others: "Health and Spirits can only belong unalloyed to the selfish Man -- the man who thinks much of his fellows can never be in Spirits."<sup>5</sup> Keats saw this sympathy of the heart, as Wordsworth did, as an enlightened wisdom and evidence of the progress of the human race; out of sorrow, Keats said, comes wisdom: "Byron says, 'Knowledge is Sorrow'; and I go on to say 'Sorrow is Wisdom'."<sup>6</sup> This sorrow benefits not only society, but also the individual. The individual who attempts to realize his own identity will find "how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a Soul." The world is of some use to each of us because it is a place where "the

1. Forman, ed. Letters, pp. 315-16.

2. Forman, ed. Letters, p. 346.

3. Ibid.

4. Forman, ed. Letters, p. 56. Berryman cites this phrase in his index.

5. Forman, ed. Letters, pp. 315-16.

6. Forman, ed. Letters, p. 142.

heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways!" and "sucks its identity."<sup>1</sup>

Wherever Keats mentions suffering, he stresses that all "uncomfortable hours" come out of the individual's experience and that suffering may be understood only in individual terms. This seems to have been generally true of Keats's contemporaries; M.H. Abrams points out that the major German Romantic philosophers no longer found that suffering was according to "a divine plan for sorting out those beings who will be translated to a better world"; the Romantic philosophers in fact "undertook to justify the experience of suffering within the limits of experience itself."<sup>2</sup> The individual experience of suffering has been no less an American preoccupation from Walt Whitman ("I was the man.... I suffered.... I was there" in "Song of Myself") and Emily Dickinson to the present. Some would say that American poetry since the 1950's has dwelt too much upon individual suffering; it is too subjective and therefore self-pitying and yelping. We have now the "confessional poets," some of whom dangle their nerve ends in public, and Berryman is sometimes placed in this school. If confessional poetry is nothing more than a self-pitying yelp, then Berryman has been misaligned. While we witness his suffering, we also witness his supreme concern -- the suffering of others. What his doctor said of Berryman personally applies as well to his poetry:

You don't talk about personal problems in reference to John. His problems should be viewed as cosmic. I don't know that he cared one way or another about himself. His identification with others' suffering was enormous. 3

Berryman's index to Keats's Letters indicates that he identified with Keats's suffering, but on the matter of the English neglecting their

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1. Forman, ed. Letters, p.336.
  2. M.H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p.444.
  3. A. Boyd Thomas, "Berryman... The Price He Paid for His Poetry," Minneapolis Tribune, July 8, 1973, p.9D.

poets to the poet's benefit, he seemed to disagree. Berryman's underlining, phrasing, and exclamation mark reflect an incredulity rather than agreement: "pro English neglect!" Elsewhere, Berryman's opinion of America's neglecting her poets certainly undercuts any agreement with Keats on this point; he says to an interviewer that his generation has "every right to be disturbed":

You ask me why my generation seems to be so screwed up?  
But I really don't know why. They just seem to be unhappy....  
It seems they have every right to be disturbed. The current American society would drive anybody out of his skull, anybody who is at all responsive; it is almost unbearable. It doesn't treat its poets very well; that's a difficulty. President Johnson invited me to the White House by ordinary mail, but the letter reached me in Ireland, a few weeks after the ceremony. From public officials we expect lies and we get them in profusion. 1

Certainly American society's unresponsiveness to poets seems to be one cause for the American poet's suffering.<sup>2</sup> The whole turbulent world hurling through circumstances Keats would not have imagined possible would seem as likely a cause for the poet's misery.

In a recent article entitled "A World Too Much with Us," Saul Bellow briefly sketches the sprawling reality of the individual amid our global chaos:

Each of us stands in the middle of things exposed to the great public noise. This is not the materialism against which Wordsworth warned us. It goes much deeper. All minds are preoccupied with terror, crime, the instability of cities, the future of nations, crumbling empires, foundering currencies, the poisoning of nature, the ultimate weapons. To recite the list is itself unsettling. 3

These unsettling circumstances and our corresponding responses have been with us for some time. Bellow recalls that Berryman once told him that T.S. Eliot said he could no longer read the daily newspaper, "It was too exciting." The poet, or artist, or any sensitive person is especially vulnerable; Henry observes a suffering similar to that of Eliot's:

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1. Kostelanetz, "Conversation with Berryman" p.344.
  2. Berryman said in another interview: "... in our society he [the artist] gets no support." Heyen, "John Berryman: A Memoir and an Interview," p.60.
  3. Saul Bellow, "A World Too Much with Us," Critical Inquiry, 2 (Autumn 1975), p.3.

-- It takes me so long to read the 'paper,  
said to me one day a novelist hot as a firecracker,  
because I have to identify myself with everyone in it,  
including the corpses, pal.

(The D.S. III, 53)

This "monstrous appetite," in Douglas Dunn's phrase, of our recent history seems insatiable -- world-concentration camps, Viet Nam, Ulster. But Dunn asks the important question for the modern poet: "But to alter the psychologies that make them [the miseries] possible?"<sup>1</sup> Dunn seems to agree with Auden's estimate of poetry:

... poetry makes nothing happen: it survives  
In the valley of its making.... 2

Though Berryman would agree with Auden and Dunn, he would, I believe, hold out and hope to arouse our feelings and influence the conduct of the few who read poetry, the "gallant few" Henry says; he would, as Auden went on to say, "still persuade us to rejoice."

But if the poet must participate in the events of the times, he should be, he may in fact have to be, tough-minded and wear a heavier armor of objectivity. Berryman recognized early in his poetry that the poet could literally drive himself mad by participating too much and identifying with everyone's suffering. If one were to identify with the events reported in a newspaper for one day, say May 11, 1939, he would likely find it unbearable:

If it were possible to take these things  
Quite seriously, I believe that they might  
Carry disorder in the strongest brain,  
Paralyze the most resilient will,  
Stop trains, break up the city's food supply,  
And perfectly demoralize the nation.

(20P. p.72)

But Berryman's Audenesque "World Telegram" does not seem to have pointed a way he would take; to the end, "his identification with others' suffering

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1. Dunn, "Gaiety & Lamentation," p.77.
  2. W.H. Auden, "In Memory of W.B. Yeats," Collected Shorter Poems, 1927-1957, (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), p.142.

was enormous." Perhaps he could not help himself as a Minneapolis journalist observed in a tribute to Berryman: "It was as if cruelty and violence loved to tease him. He hated them but he didn't know how to protect himself."<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, there seemed to be a less humane and more self-centered reason for Berryman's suffering. Similar in kind, though not in degree, to Keats's idea that English ill treatment was beneficial to the poet, Berryman "strongly" believed in suffering as a creative spur:

... I do strongly feel that among the greatest pieces of luck of high achievement is ordeal. Certain great artists can make out without it, Titian and others, but mostly you need ordeal. My idea is this: the artist is extremely lucky who is presented with the worst possible ordeal which will not actually kill him. At that point he's in business. 2

A number of critics, Irvin Ehrenpreis being a recent one (Berryman crucified himself on "the cross of the creative imagination"<sup>3</sup>), and some British and American poets flatly reject Berryman's notion. They all agree that Berryman is a poet to be admired in many ways, even an "exemplar," but not a poet whose risky and costly example is "likely to bring on a stampede of true disciples."<sup>4</sup> Douglas Dunn, the British poet, sees Berryman's suffering as a "failure" in personal terms, though not in "human" (Dunn emphasizes Berryman's humanity) or artistic terms. An American poet, William Heyen, admired Berryman's art too, but he sees a "line between truth-telling and morbidity"; Heyen turns to the grace and control of a Wallace Stevens or a Richard Wilbur:

I have come to find my own life in Stevens or Wilbur. There are lives of obsession and frenzy, and there are lives of gentleness and grace and control. And it may be that our lives are to a great extent what we wish and will them to be. 5

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1. Robert T. Smith, The Minneapolis Tribune, January 9, 1972, p.1B
  2. Stitt, "The Art of Poetry: An Interview with John Berryman," p.207.
  3. Irvin Ehrenpreis, "The State of Poetry" The New York Review of Books, XIII (January 22, 1976), 3.
  4. Engel, "An Educational Incident," p.18.
  5. Heyen, "John Berryman: A Memoir and an Interview" p.54.

Heyen cites "Dream Song 265" where Henry says that "next time it will be nature & Thoreau," but Henry loves "the spare, the hit-or-miss,/ the mad." Heyen is of course partly right; Henry also says in the same Song, "O Formal & elaborate I choose you." Heyen ignores other Dream Songs where Henry not only "Gives" and "Sympathizes" nearly to madness but also wants to "Control" his grief and suffering. In one Song Henry will say

It's miserable how many miserable are  
over the spread world at this tick of time

(The D.S. VI, 223)

but in another he wishes to "control grief" ("Control it now, it can do no good") and "reckon with what is left/not what was lost" (The D.S. VII, 325). He wants his reader to know that he has proved on the pulses the axiom "Do, ut des" (The D.S. II, 46) ("I give that you may give").

Again and again he "sends" his grief away:

- I sent my grief away. I cannot care  
forever. With them all again & again I died  
and cried, and I have to live.

(The D.S. II, 36)

Henry says "and I have to live" rather than "but I have to live"; he still wants to live but not to exclude the reality of other s' suffering. He expresses the same ambiguous feeling later when he says "'Down with them all,'" meaning "down" in the sense of to put aside and to be down with:

'Down with them all!' Henry suddenly cried.  
Their deaths were theirs. I wait on my own,  
I dare say it won't be long.  
I have tried to be them, god knows I have tried,  
but they are past it all, I have not done....

(The D.S. V, 146)

Berryman's feeling that ordeal must be consciously sought out to charge creativity might seem contrary to the idea that the sensitive poet is helpless and tossed about in a brutish world. These two ideas,

however, are not mutually exclusive. The sensitive poet may live in a brutish world but some poets find this brutish world more stimulating to their creativity than others; "some writers," Berryman says, "are able to use what psychologists call 'the deposit of emotion' as a basis for production."<sup>1</sup> We may question the poet's seeking after suffering, but any answer would not invalidate the proposition that suffering may be stimulating. And further, suffering may be the quickest way to the individual's sense of the external world. Matthew Arnold, a poet who knew the cost and benefit of suffering, said that "deep suffering is the consciousness of oneself no less than deep enjoyment."<sup>2</sup> Berryman and Keats seemed to believe more in deep suffering as a means of arriving at a consciousness of oneself and a means of feeling one's relation to the external world. Berryman's index to Keats's Letters has a cross reference which reveals his own feeling that suffering gives one a sense of reality. Under the two separate categories of "reality" and "real griefs" he cites the same page ("reality 397!" and "real griefs 397!"). Both references are to Keats's Letter to Charles Brown:

Imaginary grievances have always been more my torment than real ones.... Real ones will never have any other effect upon me than to stimulate me to get out of or avoid them. This is easily accounted for. Our imaginary woes are conjured up by our passions, and are fostered by passionate feelings; our real ones come of themselves, and are opposed by an abstract exertion of mind. Real grievances are displacers of passion. The imaginary nail a man down for a sufferer, as on a cross; the real spur him up in an agent. 3

When we consider Berryman's great concern with the creation of an identity, which is established over a period of time in relation to the external world, it becomes apparent that Berryman saw suffering as a short cut to connecting with the external world. Joy and deep pleasure may be a means of intensely realizing one's relationship with the external world,

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1. Heyen, "John Berryman: A Memoir and an Interview," p.60.
  2. Arnold, The Poems of Matthew Arnold, p.220n.
  3. Forman, ed. Letters, p.397.

but these are not as accessible as suffering. One may suffer simply by falling down or stabbing his arm:

Feeling no pain,  
Henry stabbed his arm and wrote a letter  
explaining how bad it had been  
in this world.

(The D.S. III, 74)

Like St. Augustine one may even take suffering to be a means to grace, a means of driving us towards, or bringing us back to, God. As Anne Bradstreet in Berryman's poem says, "torture me, Father, lest not I be thine!"<sup>1</sup> Few of us could bear such an admonition; many of us would try to avoid pain as Job did or as Keats said he did. Most of us would find that suffering as a short-cut to "reality" would be short-circuiting of ourselves. But Keats wanted to <sup>be</sup> contend with "imaginary woes" rather than "real ones"; he probably had in mind the point he made in an earlier letter about the "vale of Soul-making" in which "the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways." He came to learn the cost of the poet's practicing that notion; near the end of his short life he advised his sister: Do not suffer your Mind to dwell on unpleasant reflections -- that sort of thing has been the destruction of my health."<sup>2</sup> But his identification with others' suffering was so intense that he could not control his grief: "I have never known any unalloy'd Happiness for many days together: the death or sickness of some one has always spoilt my hours...."<sup>3</sup>

It would be an oversimplification to say that Berryman sought out suffering simply to spur his creativity or that he wanted to suffer in order to create a sense of identity. Nor would it be entirely right, though there might be some truth in it, to say that he immersed himself

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1. John Berryman, Homage to Mistress Bradstreet (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Cudahy, 1956). Hereafter cited internally as Homage. Since there are no page numbers, I shall cite my references by the stanza and line number, as in the above quotation (39.1).
  2. Forman, ed. Letters, p.516.
  3. Forman, ed. Letters, p.353.

in suffering so deeply that there would be no hope of creating an identity because the self no longer existed. Whatever suffering was to Berryman himself, in his poetry suffering never wholly engulfs the speaker. Henry, for example, is never completely overcome by his suffering. We may speak of the notion of the chameleon poet as a dramatic device which gives the poem a sense of life, but inevitably we are forced to connect the notion to the external world. The value of Berryman's chameleon poet is, then, an extra-poetic notion because it makes us more aware of the external world; he never suggests that we should suffer in order to forget ourselves.

Like Matthew Arnold, Berryman felt that the individual in the modern world has evolved an abstract relationship with the world, and that this abstract relationship increased as feeling decreased. Arnold says in his notes,

The misery of the present age is not in the intensity of men's suffering -- but in their incapacity to suffer, enjoy, feel at all, wholly and profoundly; in their having their susceptibility externally agacée /sic/ by a continual dance of everchanging objects... the external tumult of the world mingling, breaking in upon, hurrying away all. 1

In a recent assessment of the American climate, John W. Aldridge expresses a similar but more specific feeling that "the possibilities for individually experiencing others have receded":

By degrees we have fallen into the habit of seeing people as statistical phenomena or as a race of generalized others who do not exist except as embodiments of inequities or injustices which first called them to our attention. And even as we offer them our official sympathies and register our concern for their predicament by writing our congressmen and supporting our favorite charities, we have to admit that we have lost the power to offer them felt sympathies -- or even for that matter felt hostilities -- we would automatically be able to give if they were real to us as persons. 2

One may of course make a convincing argument that this plea for individual

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1. Arnold, The Poems of Matthew Arnold, p.220.
  2. John W. Aldridge, "Civilization in the United States," The Devil in the Fire (New York: Harpers Magazine Press, 1972), pp.317-18.

sympathy was urged as long ago as The Iliad. But our two world wars and the massive crushing horrors they brought certainly have accelerated our chaos and diminished our general sense of real persons living with other real persons. The impersonality of killing with larger, more devastating, longer distance weapons gives us no sense of people at the end of the trajectory, they are euphemistically called targets.

Some of these who lived through the Second World War sometimes say, as G.S. Fraser does, that the war seemed to have affected them less than succeeding generations:

It is almost as if the horrors of the Second World War, from Auschwitz to Hiroshima, having failed to penetrate very deeply into the imaginations of men in their forties <sup>Fraser writes</sup> in 1964<sup>7</sup> who served through that war (we anaesthetized that, and we were on the right side) had pierced through, twenty years later, to the imaginations of the younger generation. 1

This account sounds similar to Keats's distinction between "real griefs" and "imaginary woes"; to project oneself imaginatively into horrors may very well be more keenly felt than real horrors; perhaps real horrors numb us more because our senses are numbed, we want to run away from real pain. The "younger generation" to whom Mr. Fraser refers are poets like Ted Hughes, George McBeth, and Peter Porter. He cites A. Alvarez's introduction to the "New Poetry" of the late fifties and early sixties (Lowell and Berryman were the two major poets in Alvarez's estimation) as a summary of the kind of poetry which had pierced their imaginations. Mr. Fraser picks up Alvarez's phrase, "anti-gentility poetry" and says that indeed gentility has more to offer than Alvarez will allow. Mr. Fraser feels that the "New Poetry" broods and lingers too much over the horrors and nastiness in the world. While that might be true, Alvarez does not advocate any such perverse brooding; he says that modern poetry, and English poetry in particular, should come to a "new seriousness" a

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1. <sup>1964</sup> Fraser, The Modern Writer and His World, p.352.

seriousness which demands nothing less than "the full range of... the poet's experience and his intelligence."<sup>1</sup> In short, Alvarez feels that the modern poet should not "take easy exits of either the conventional response to gentility or choking in incoherence."<sup>2</sup> Alvarez flatly rejects a poetry of either private or public chamber of horrors:

I am not suggesting that modern English poetry, to be really modern, must be concerned with psychoanalysis or with concentration camps or with the hydrogen bomb or with any other of the modern horrors. I am not suggesting, in fact, that it must be anything. For poetry that feels it has to cope with predetermined subjects ceases to be poetry and becomes propaganda. I am, however, suggesting that it drop the pretence that life, give or take a few social distinctions, is the same as ever, that gentility, decency and all of the other social totems will eventually muddle through. 3

Mr. Fraser's point still cannot be denied: "To rub our noses in horrors might make us more humane, but again it might not...."<sup>4</sup> Certainly the British and American poets (Douglas Dunn and William Heyen) whom I quoted earlier would agree (Heyen on a personal level; Dunn feels that we cannot change the nature of man -- man will inevitably create his horrors). In the end, it would be unhealthy if all of us, or even all of our poets, went on brooding over past or present horrors: if one believe in the power of poetry and the direction it may lead us, the subject will be a happier one, as Mr. Fraser says,

There are many hellish things that have happened in the world about which the best advice is still Dante's: Take one look and move onwards. I hope that the race will move onwards, and that poetry will help it make its path. 5

With this advice Mr. Fraser closes the argument, but I would suggest that his advice makes an admirable axiom but an impossible solution. To rub our noses in the real horrors of our time might not make us any more humane

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1. Alvarez, The New Poetry (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1962), p.28.
  2. Ibid.
  3. Ibid., pp.27-28.
  4. Fraser, The Modern Writer and His World, p.353.
  5. Ibid., p.355.

but for succeeding generations to ignore that they happened would be to ignore the possibility of their happening again. Mr. Fraser rightly points out that we should not underestimate "the power of the dead to bury their dead, and the extraordinary recuperative force of the human appetite for the normal," but to "take one look" would be in effect muddling on. While the idea of taking one look does have the redeeming solace of not allowing oneself to be crushed by a brutish world (that is, if one is not among the débris of its path), the notion does not allow for the nature of our experience in suffering, either individually or en masse. How can we "take one look" at the physical and mental scars of those who fought in the Second World War; how responsible would we be to "take one look" at Viet Nam and Ulster and Angola and so much else. We do, let us hope, move onwards, but the process of moving onwards must necessarily crawl at a sluggish pace; we must allow ourselves time to assimilate in a sort of osmosis of feeling and understanding. Repressing hellishness has as little to recommend as wallowing in it. Perhaps our "new Poetry beyond the gentility principle" is a necessary process of dissolving and absorbing the hellish parts of our experience, a process which must last for some years before we move onwards to a more sensitive humanity. Keats, who matured so much more rapidly than we can expect of civilization, believed firmly that "there must be we cannot be [sic] created for this sort of suffering."<sup>1</sup> It seems that we find ourselves just over thirty years after the Second World War almost where Henry finds himself "making ready to move on" with "ancient fires for eyes" and with our "heads full" and our "hearts full" (The D.S. III, 77). Perhaps our hearts are not quite full; full awareness is not what we have most of if we measure our awareness and sympathy according to our actions.

All suffering of course may not be written off as the result of the sad misfortunes of our times. Berryman recognized that suffering is

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1. Forman, ed. Letters, p.520.

the result of many other losses, and throughout his poetry he investigates not just the "individual soul under stress"<sup>1</sup> but the limits, validity, and nature of our knowledge of the loss that causes the stress, what Berryman calls "the epistemology of loss." There is the loss of the security of innocence as in "The Ball Poem." This loss of innocence may be seen as occurring even before adolescence; we begin life, Berryman says, "with a great loss from the controlled environment of the womb."<sup>2</sup> Related to this loss of innocence, but expanded to cosmic proportions, is the loss of Eden, the fall of man and his first disobedience to God. Anyone who is aware of the history of man cannot ignore this loss; we may try to do so, as Henry does, but we cannot ignore that loss of a harmony with God:

He'd 've Henry run off to see  
(but for his studies careful of the Fall)  
twenty odd years ago.

(The D.S. V, 141)

Then there are personal losses, all "irreversible" as the suicide of Berryman's father or the death of his friends. All of these losses, finally, must be related to death, what the theologian John S. Dunne calls "the problem of death." Dunne's specific reference is to "Myth and Mortality" but the general form of the problem of death would be this: "If I must some day die, what can I do to satisfy my desire to live?"<sup>3</sup> In other words, we live our lives anticipating our own loss of life along with those other losses we experience. If we do not attempt to come to terms with these losses, then we live in a "horror of unlove" (The D.S. III, 74) (love being our expression of satisfying our desire to live), and we deny ourselves courage and "a degree of gentleness" (The D.S. VII, 350), the noblest of man's possibilities.

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1. Kostelanets, "Conversation with Berryman," p. 345.
  2. Heyen, "John Berryman: A Memoir and an Interview," p. 60.
  3. John S. Dunne, The City of the Gods (London: Sheldon Press, 1965), p. xi.

No discussion of Berryman and suffering would be complete without remembering that Berryman takes on more suffering than most poets. Of course any writer who takes his work seriously labors under the burden of spinning words out of his mind and experience; what Stephen Spender says of writing poetry applies to the majority of poets:

There is no doubt that writing poetry, when a poem appears to succeed, results in an intense physical excitement, a sense of release and ecstasy. On the other hand, I dread writing poetry, for, I suppose, the following reasons: a poem is a terrible journey, a painful effort of concentrating the imagination; words are an extremely difficult medium to use, and sometimes when one has spent days trying to say a thing clearly one finds that one has only said it dully; above all, the writing of a poem brings one face to face with one's own personality with all its familiar and clumsy limitations. 1

The poet, as Berryman says, is "just a man alone in a room with the English language, trying to make it come out right"<sup>2</sup>; some artists suffer more than others as they try to get out of their room, like Hawthorne who said he had locked himself in a room and was unable to find the key; but all artists who produce anything to which we continue to respond know life at its most intense and significant. But Berryman's ambition was greater than most poets; he did not just want to be "like Yeats but be Yeats." "The important thing," he said, "is that your work be something no one else could do."<sup>3</sup> This ambition is a unique malady in American writers. To achieve this ambition for any talented poet is a daunting task and more so if his experience is to be the bedrock of his poetry. Writing thinly disguised autobiographical poetry or fiction makes extreme demands upon the artist. For example, Richard Ellmann says that Joyce confessed in later life that autobiography as a basis of his fiction presented special difficulties for him. Joyce tried to explain the difficulty to his friend Louis Gillet: "When your work and your life are one, when they

1. Stephen Spender, The Making of a Poem (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1962), p.61.

2. Howard, "Whisky and Ink, Whisky and Ink," p.70.

3. Ibid.

are interwoven in the same fabric....," but then Joyce hesitated, Ellmann explains, "as if overcome by the hardship of his 'sedentary trade';"<sup>1</sup>

Ellmann continues:

The fact that he [Joyce] was turning his life to fiction at the same time that he was living it encouraged him to feel a certain detachment from what happened to him, for he knew he could reconsider and re-order it for the purposes of his book. At the same time, since he felt dependent for material upon actual events, he had an interest in bringing simmering pots to a strong boil, in making the events through which he lived take on as extreme a form as possible. 2

Something very much like that happened to Berryman I believe; he kept saying near the end of his life that he had to stay "hot as a pistol," his doctor said that Berryman "made every encounter a happening,"<sup>3</sup> and Lowell said that the more Berryman became "inspired and famous and drunk" the less he became "good company and more a happening."<sup>4</sup> As the modern poet looks back at his own and others' experience, as he looks back at how all have said it before him, he may very well throw up his hands and say all has been said. Nevertheless, the business of the poet, as Berryman knew and practised it, is to be true to what he knows, feels, experiences, and intuits; to go about his business may cost him friendship, happiness, and even his life.

One extension of Berryman's desire to "do something no one else could do" was that he regarded himself mainly as an epic poet in an age when few wrote epic poetry. Poe's dictum that the long poem was a contradiction in terms did not convince Berryman. Berryman said that "your idea of yourself and your relation to your art has a great deal to do with what actually happens."<sup>5</sup> In Berryman's poetic life, several

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1. Richard Ellmann, James Joyce (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p.154.

2. Ibid.

3. Thomas, "Berryman... The Price He Paid for His Poetry," p.8D.

4. Lowell, "For John Berryman," p.3.

5. Stitt, "The Art of Poetry: An Interview with John Berryman," p.199.

An interesting variation of Berryman's desire to continue doing "something as different as possible" may be found in A. Alvarez's book The Savage God. Alvarez says that when the nature of the artistic undertaking itself (that is, when there is this "constant need to change, to innovate") changes radically, it may be one of the contributing causes to a writer's suicide. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1971), p.281.

things happened. He changed styles several times; he began writing short poems, then long poems, and finally, he returned to short lyrics. Berryman's fluctuations of how he saw himself in relation to his art may have added to his suffering; certainly these fluctuations added some anxiety ("after having done one thing" Berryman said, "you want to do something as different as possible."<sup>1</sup>) When we place that ambition alongside Berryman's strong feeling that ordeal is necessary for high achievement and then add to these his feeling that "a poet's endowment is a very small part of achievement"<sup>2</sup> (hard work and sweat are much more important), one wonders how quickly a poet will burn himself out. The long poem by the very nature of the work made extreme demands upon Berryman. ("Beware" said Goethe to Eckermann, "of attempting a large work. It is exactly that which injures our best minds, even those distinguished by the finest talents and most earnest efforts. I have suffered from this cause, and know how much it injured me.")<sup>3</sup> Berryman found that a long poem took him five to ten years;<sup>4</sup> after he had finished Homage to Mistress Bradstreet he said, "it took me two years to recover"; after The Dream Songs he said "the question... was whether I would ever again attempt a long poem, and I thought it improbable, so I didn't expect to write any more verse."<sup>5</sup> Berryman did of course write more verse after The Dream Songs, but not as ambitious in length as either of these two long poems. But the demands of writing short poems seemed no less strenuous: "I've written over a hundred poems in the last six months. I'm a complete wreck,"<sup>6</sup> he said after he wrote Love & Fame. Few poets could bear the risks, the "ferocious commitment," of writing The Dream Songs in "volcanic bursts"<sup>7</sup> over a period of eleven years.

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1. Kostelanetz, "Conversation with Berryman," p.346.
  2. Stitt, "The Art of Poetry", p.206.
  3. Eckermann, Conversations of Goethe, p.17.
  4. Stitt, "An Interview with John Berryman," p.206.
  5. Ibid., p.199.
  6. Ibid., p.206.
  7. Ibid.

Part of the "high and prolonged riskiness" involved in writing the long poem is that the modern poet can not rely on a constructed world like that of Dante and Vergil, or for that matter the world "available to a small poem."<sup>1</sup> (Compare Berryman's satisfaction with his title poem "The Dispossessed": he said he liked this poem because of "my sense at the time of succeeding in some degree with the job I set myself."<sup>2</sup>) For the modern poet write a long poem without a notion of where he is going is truly to be "at the mercy of sustained inspiration."<sup>3</sup> One last problem which Berryman felt the long poem created is the problem of "decorum most poets happily don't have to face."<sup>4</sup> By "decorum" Berryman means a mixed bag of high and low -- that is, a mixed bag of lyric grandeur and "coarse jokes and hell-spinning puns," of a diction that is consistent with the speaker (as Henry in black face), and of trying to create a poetry that is both funny and frightening.<sup>5</sup>

Berryman did attempt at least one other long poem before Homage to Mistress Bradstreet. (I would exclude Berryman's Sonnets, though they have the feel of a long poem.) It was to be called The Black Book probably begun in the late 1940's,<sup>6</sup> and was to be about the Nazi murders of the Jews. Berryman had planned it in the form of a Mass for the Dead, the structure being in forty-two sections. But "the subject was," Berryman said, "it was more than I could bear."<sup>7</sup> He published a few of the poems but had had enough; "let the poem go to hell," he said, and then added, "I don't think I can do it. I don't feel I want to."<sup>8</sup> Because of his suicide and because he sought out

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1. Berryman, "One Answer to a Question," p.131.
  2. Paul Engle and Joseph Langland eds., Poet's Choice (New York: The Dial Press, 1962), p.136.
  3. Sisson, "My Whiskers Fly: An Interview with John Berryman," p.15.
  4. Berryman, "One Answer to a Question," p.131.
  5. Ibid.
  6. Some of the poems were first published in Poetry, LXXV (January 1950), pp.192-196.
  7. Sisson, "My Whiskers Fly: An Interview with John Berryman," p.16.
  8. Ibid.

ordeal as a creative spur, it is tempting to overemphasize Berryman's search for suffering wherever he could find it. His refusing to continue with The Black Book clearly tells us that he did not pursue every path to destruction and that the world of pains and troubles is not for him merely a subject to make his art sensational.

I feel certain that F.R. Leavis would not rank Berryman, if he bothered with him at all, among the great poets because Berryman is not a poet we should emulate. But Berryman is a great poet in Whitman's sense that the poet is a teacher, not a prophet, but a teacher. Like Whitman, Berryman will not bring a stampede of followers, but we ignore a dimension of ourselves and of our time if we choose not to listen to his music. His role as a teacher points to another aspect of the strong relationship between Berryman and Keats, for Keats too wanted to convince "one's nerves" of the world of "Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression." Christopher Ricks observes that "it is 'convincing one's nerves' which is so authentically Keats; to convince one's reason, and to stir one's nerves, these are valuable enough, but the fusion in Keats's best poetry and letters, his essential ambition, was to convince one's nerves -- his own and ours."<sup>1</sup> And yet Ricks feels that Keats's greatness as a writer and a person "has less to do 'with convincing one's [sic] nerves that the World is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression,' than with convincing one's nerves that the world is full of delight, health, and liberation -- all of which are sometimes ours, and needing to be achieved rather than sure to drop into our hands, and all of which are other people's around us."<sup>2</sup> Though Berryman's pinpoints of light do not shine as brightly as Keats's "generous light," they do show through; all is not darkness. There is much hellishness in Berryman's life and poetry, but as we have seen and shall see in more detail, there is also much delight, health, and liberation, all of which we need to achieve "rather than sure to drop into our hands."

1. Christopher Ricks, Keats and Embarrassment (London: Oxford at Clarendon Press, 1974), p.156.

2. Ibid.

## PART III: THE EBB AND FLOW OF BERRYMAN'S POETRY : THE THREE PHASES

"... a pure system of spasms. My career is like that.  
It is horribly like that."

John Berryman

My discussion thus far has been mainly an inquiry into Berryman's poetics, his development of simple and complex rhythms, his thinking behind dramatic principles, and some of the questions and answers all of these suggest. We come now to a closer consideration of the three major phases of Berryman's poetry: from 1935 to 1948, 1948 to 1968, and finally 1968 to 1972. In suggesting these periods of Berryman's poetry, I do not intend to imply a linear and structured development, sharply divided at points and moving ever onwards, ever upwards; my intention is to see each phase as a spasmodic field of energy (self contained in a way, but each field being inter-related) in which Berryman takes one mode or manner or style as far as he seems capable and then sets out to explore and generate a different field of energy. Rather than attempt to cover every single element in each of Berryman's phases, I have chosen three volumes which I believe best represent each period: The Dispossessed (1948), Berryman's first major collection; The Dream Songs (1964-1968), his major work; and finally Love & Fame (1971)<sup>1</sup>, his penultimate volume. I skip over detailed comment on Berryman's Sonnets, Homage to Mistress Bradstreet, and Delusions, Etc. only because I see them as less representative of each of three phases. These three volumes are either parts of or connections between Berryman's three phases: Sonnets overlaps between the first phase and the second (they were written just before The Dispossessed was published); Homage

1. I shall use Berryman's revised edition of Love & Fame.

belongs to the great period of The Dream Songs; and Delusions, Etc., Berryman's posthumous volume, belongs to the last phase of Love & Fame.

I. The Dispossessed (1948) -- "Give, Sympathize, Control"

In the title poem "The Dispossessed" the speaker says that his "harpsichord" of poetry is "weird as a koto" and that it "drums/adagio for twilight." In a way, the rhythms of the whole volume fluctuate from the ease and grace of adagio, to the clink and plink of a harpsichord, either a frenetic or a somber drumming. The volume as a whole, like koto music, at first appears formless and yet there is a skeletal resonance, or what we may call an "administrative rhythm set" as Berryman described the first poem of Love & Fame.<sup>1</sup> Part of the difficulty of seeing The Dispossessed as a whole is that the poems were written over about a ten year period, a time during which Berryman's style and manner developed from adapting other voices to finding his own. Randall Jarrell, in his review of The Dispossessed, asked the reader to compare an early poem with the last poem of the volume, and then he commented: "How things have changed!"<sup>2</sup>

Generally the 1948 reviews of The Dispossessed were favorable. Jarrell was not unreservedly admiring, but nevertheless, looked forward "with real curiosity and pleasure to Mr. Berryman's new poems...."<sup>3</sup> Taken as a whole, the reviews seem to divide distinctly between those who admired the craftsmanship and tradition of Berryman's Yeatsian, Eliotian

1. Berryman, "Afterward," Love & Fame, p.96.

2. Randall Jarrell, "Verse Chronicle," The Nation (July 17, 1948), 81.

3. Ibid.

poems (curiously no-one mentions Auden) and those who admired the  
bristling lurches of his later poems. The British reviewer in The  
Times Literary Supplement praised The Dispossessed for its "living  
tradition": "There is a great deal of conscious absorption and  
adaptation of influences (notably that of Yeats), but there are no  
lazy echoes."<sup>1</sup> Ivor Winters saw less of a tradition and more of a  
"loose monotony": "It is hard to tell one poem from another; the poems  
blur together in the memory...."<sup>2</sup> And Dudley Fitts, who, we recall,  
said of "Canto Amor" that it was "so encrusted with old jewelry that  
it barely moves," advised Berryman to "release the lightning & let it  
dance."<sup>3</sup> It would seem that none of these reviewers had read the whole  
volume, or if they did, they chose to ignore the last half of it. Most  
reviewers responded to the later poems, Berryman's "Song of the Nerves"  
as Richard Eberhart called his review, indicating not only that he  
admired the nervousness of Berryman's poetry, but also that the nervous-  
ness was made into "song":

It is not fragments I indicate, rather intensity of perception  
neatly, shortly, deftly placed, spaced and "estopped." Berryman  
is a man who would use the word estop. Estop is "Rare." 4

Eberhart concluded in his review: "There is more possession than dis-  
possession in it."<sup>5</sup> Neil Weiss responded similarly to the last sections  
of The Dispossessed:

We read his powerful deformation of the language with a spontaneity  
and hilarity that denote him a blood relation /of our time in 1948/.  
Hysteria and deformation are Berryman's tools -- a strictly  
controlled hysteria.... 6

And again, Randall Jarrell on the later poems: "conscious, dissonant,  
darting; allusive, always over- or under- satisfying the expectations

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1. Anonymous, "An American Poet," The Times Literary Supplement, July 3, 1948, p.374.
  2. Ivor Winters, "Three Poets," The Hudson Review I (Autumn 1948), 404.
  3. Fitts, "Deep in the Unfriendly City," p.4.
  4. Richard Eberhart, "Song of the Nerves," Poetry (Chicago), LXXIII (October 1948), 45.
  5. Ibid.
  6. Neil Weiss, "The Grace and the Hysteria," The New Leader, July 3, 1948, p.10.

which... [they are] intelligently exploiting."<sup>1</sup> But perhaps Robert Lowell, with the cooler objectivity of about sixteen years distance, best describes the swing in The Dispossessed from adagio to piu moscato; he says of an early poem, "Winter Landscape" (1938-39), that it has "gentleness and delicacy and clarity"; had Berryman, Lowell says, continued this "lucid, cool Bernassian" mode, "he would at least have been notable as a technician"; but he chose "a more reckless and tortured line," a style "full of elbows, quaintness and stops."<sup>2</sup> Of course not all of Berryman's early poems are as lucid as "Winter Landscape"; some, like "At Chinese Checkers," are tangentially ruminative, nearly sprawling.

So there are lurches and sidles in The Dispossessed. It was a slow eight or ten years' process during which Berryman created his own idiom. (Lowell compares Berryman's development with Jarrell's: "compared with other poets John was a prodigy; compared with Jarrell, a slow starter."<sup>3</sup>) Berryman did not want simply to "improve" he wanted to "develop." "Improvement" Berryman said of Dylan Thomas's poetry, is writing "extremely well, without undue self-imitation, and with a mildly expanding range of subject,"<sup>4</sup> but "development," Berryman would imply elsewhere, is "after having done one thing... you want to do something as different as possible,"<sup>5</sup> and, we might add, succeed in doing so. The distance in time between the first poem "Winter Landscape" and last poem "The Dispossessed" is about eleven years, and the distance between the two poems in so far as Berryman's "doing something as different as possible" is considerable as well. So let us turn to a comparative analysis of these two poems, a comparison and contrast which should not only reveal the changes from a reliance on rhythm to the mode of dramatization, Berryman's "accretion" as he might say, but

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1. Jarrell, "Verse Chronicle," p.81.
  2. Lowell, "The Poetry of John Berryman," p.3.
  3. Lowell, "For John Berryman," p.3.
  4. Berryman, "Lowell, Thomas & Co.," p.81.
  5. Kostelanetz, "Conversation with Berryman," p.346.

also set in motion the extremes of the difficult rhythms of the volume as a whole.

"Winter Landscape," published July 3, 1940,<sup>1</sup> is an extremely sober and somber poem. It has a "gentleness and delicacy and clarity," as Lowell says, but its mood, as in the Dream Song (382) about the dancer, is "subdued, subdued":

The three men coming down the winter hill  
In brown, with tall poles and a pack of hounds  
At heel, through the arrangement of the trees  
Past the five figures at the burning straw,  
Returning cold and silent to their town,

Returning to the drifted snow, the rink  
Lively with children, to the older men,  
The long companions they can never reach,  
The blue light, men with ladders, by the church  
The sledge and shadow in the twilight street,

Are not aware that in the sandy time  
To come, the evil waste of history  
Outstretched, they will be seen upon the brow  
Of that same hill: when all their company  
Will have been irrecoverably lost,

These men, this particular three in brown  
Witnessed by birds will keep the scene and say  
By their configuration with the trees,  
The small bridge, the red houses and the fire,  
What place, what time, what morning occasion

Sent them into the wood, a pack of hounds  
At heel and the tall poles upon their shoulders,  
Thence to return as now we see them and  
Ankle-deep in snow down the winter hill  
Descend, while three birds watch and the fourth flies.

(T.D., p.3)

In a review of Mark Van Doren's collection of poems A Winter Diary and Other Poems, Berryman noted that the "chief mark" of the volume is "a certain reticence": "to say a thing tersely and concretely, and let the overtones take care of themselves."<sup>2</sup> "Winter Landscape"

1. John Berryman, "Winter Landscape," The New Republic, CIII (July 8, 1940) 52. I take my quotation from The Dispossessed. Unlike his habit of revising many of his early poems, Berryman made only one change (he added a comma after "Descend" in the last line) between the time the poem was first published in a magazine and the time he collected it in The Dispossessed.
2. John Berryman, A Review of A Winter Diary and Other Poems, The Columbia Review, 16 (April 1935), 42.

might owe something to Van Doren's example. "A certain reticence" and letting "the overtones take care of themselves" apply as well to "Winter Landscape." As Berryman said of "Winter Landscape," "It derives its individuality, if I am right, from a peculiar steadiness of sombre<sup>1</sup> tone...."<sup>2</sup> and Berryman was right. Blank verse gives the poem the steadiness and a certain loftiness, but the sobriety of rhythm carries the emotion and meaning -- a stretching of unstressed syllables, sonorous long vowels and diphthongs, and drawn out consonants. The first stanza is a good example:

The three men coming d(ow)n the winter hill  
 In br(ow)n, with tall p(ol)es and a pack of h(ou)nds  
 At heel, thr(ou)gh the arrangement of the trees,  
 Past the five figures burning str(aw),  
Returning c(ol)d and silent t(o) their t(ow)n....

The melancholic "ou" sound (can we take a variation of Poe's observation that the long "o" sound is the most melancholic in English, similar to a wail?) of "down," "brown," and "hounds" almost suspend the scene. "Hounds" is a calculated word; Berryman could have said "black dogs," or "gaunt dogs," or "hunting dogs," or simply "dogs," but the sound of "hounds" adds to the sense of the suspension he wanted. Variations of the "o" vowel (diphthongs and related "o" sounds) keep the whole stanza afloat: "poles," "through," "straw," "cold," "to," "town" ("town" adds to the feeling of suspension in its rhyming with "down" and "brown"). Other long vowels like "three," "heel," and "trees," the feminine rhymes of "burning" and "returning," and stretched consonants modulating into the long

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1. Both in prose and verse Berryman used British spelling conventions, "sombre" rather than "somber," but he did not consistently use British spelling.
  2. Berryman, "One Answer to a Question," p.69.

vowels ("down," "winter," "brown," "with") give the same suspending effect. All of the sounds and rhythms in the poem are not languorous. There is a crispness in "tall poles," the sounds of which look back to "hills" at the end of the previous line and forward to "pack," and still further on to the beginning of the next line "At heel" after which a pause halts the quick pace. The whole phrase "with tall poles and a pack of hounds/At heel" is what Hopkins would call a "counter-pointed" rhythm set against the slow previous phrase ("The three men coming down the winter hill/In brown") and the phrase to follow ("through the arrangements of the trees"). The effect of this counterpoint is one of movement, the three men "returning," but we are drawn into a false sense of movement because the men are figures in a painting. The dominant tone of the poem continues in a somber steadiness of the various blending elements which suspend the scene until we come to the quick movement of the last line of the penultimate stanza: "What place, what time, what morning occasion." At this point, the quickening pace of rhythm (which recalls Keats's short line questions in "Ode on a Grecian Urn") accentuates the line so that it almost turns around into a question; but the most noticeable effect of the quick rhythm and the repetition of "what" is to call attention to the pun on "morning"; indeed the rhythms have already given us that sense of mourning.

When we look closer at what the words say, we can see how remarkably the rhythms coalesce with meaning and emotion. There is a sort of historical meaning to the somber rhythms, a poem set in a particularly sad time in world history and the great melancholy of the impending world war. And for Berryman personally "Winter Landscape" was also, he said, the poet's more private reaction:

... the poem's extreme sobriety would seem to represent a reaction, first, against Yeats's gorgeous and seductive rhetoric, and, second, against the hysterical political atmosphere of the period. It dates

from 1938-9 and was written in New York following two years' residence in England, during recurrent crises, with extended visits to France and Germany, especially one of the Nazi strongholds, Heidelberg. 1

It seems to me that Berryman was successful on both counts. When we compare Yeats's poem "On a Picture of a Black Centaur by Edmund Dulac," we can see just how gorgeous and lyrical Yeats could be and how sober and matter-of-fact the blank verse (a form Yeats rarely used) of "Winter Landscape" is. And, too, there is even more of a sense of the poet's anonymity in "Winter Landscape" than even Yeats's "masks." Neither the poet nor his mask is in the poem at all. Berryman succeeded in what he said he set out to do, to react against the political hysteria of the time; he is in consonance with the strangely somber rhythms and the tranquil painting which is his metaphor of escape. The poet's absence is noticeable and mysterious, but even more mysterious are the three faceless men "dressed in brown" and who will "keep the scene" like sentinels on guard. The only discernible feature the poet describes is that they are dressed in brown (suggesting perhaps Hitler's "Brown Shirts"; in a poem written nearly a decade later Berryman speaks of "brown shirt Time" T.D. p.987); this particular three in brown dominate the scene as they return from the "hunt." This strange anonymity of the poet and subject permeates the whole poem, and it ends with a singularly sinister feel; the "three birds" watch and wait like vultures.

Berryman said that "Winter Landscape" is "a war-poem of an unusual negative kind."<sup>2</sup> This negation would seem to be both personal and historical. At this particular point in history the speaker wishes to remain anonymous; he does not want to be overwhelmed by the hysteria about him; he takes refuge in the tranquil world of the painting. His

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1. Berryman, "One Answer to a Question," p.70.

2. Ibid.

negation of the historical dimension, too, is an unwillingness to recognize the historical dimension of the painting. The subject of the poem would appear to be Brueghel's painting "Hunters in the Snow," but it is not. In his "Note" to The Dispossessed,<sup>1</sup> Berryman tried to warn readers: "... the subject of 'Winter Landscape' is not really the painting by the elder Brueghel to which the poem from start to finish refers..."<sup>2</sup> (T.D., p.vii). But "two aestheticians," as Berryman referred to them, published an essay (1963)<sup>3</sup> in which they attempted to prove that the poem is a "verbal equivalent" of Brueghel's painting. "Nowhere is anything said as to what the poem is about," Berryman responded, and his advice was that "an investigation of the differences between the poem and the painting<sup>7</sup> might have taken them further."<sup>4</sup>

"Winter Landscape" invites a comparison with Auden's poem, "Musée des Beaux Arts." In both poems a Brueghel painting is a metaphor for an expression, but unlike Auden's poem Berryman does not interpret the painting, and he relies more on the differences between the painting and life.<sup>5</sup> The idea of the relation between art and life in "Winter Landscape" is more like Keith Douglas's ironic description of a real "Landscape with Figures" in which the aftermath of a battle scene is described as a painting; the strewn dead bodies "are mines"

who express silence and futile aims enacting this prone and motionless struggle at a queer angle to the scenery.... 6

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1. Berryman's "Note" is interesting beyond the facts he was anxious for us to know. The "Note" suggests an emulation of and a reaction to Eliot's "Notes" to The Waste Land: after several fragments of information about his poems Berryman said: "I believe readers dislike notes," and then he proceeds to tell us more about another poem (T.D., p.vii).
  2. Arthur and Catherine Evans, "Pieter Brueghel and John Berryman: Two Winter Landscapes," Texas Studies in Language and Literature, V (Autumn 1963), 310-18.
  3. Berryman, "One Answer to a Question," p.70.
  4. Ibid.
  5. Berryman said that Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" was written after his "Winter Landscape." "Musée des Beaux Arts" was published as "Palais des Beaux Arts" in the Spring of 1939, before "Winter Landscape" was published. But it seems likely that the two poems were written about the same time; it is unlikely that Berryman was influenced by Auden's poem.
  6. Keith Douglas, Selected Poems: Keith Douglas, ed. Ted Hughes (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1964), p.54.

Both Berryman and Douglas take refuge, as it were, in the tranquil world of art; but where Douglas's poem suggests ironically that life has become art, Berryman suggests that art may be seen as a process of art becoming life but not quite living, a projection of "the life we all lead," but particularly an expression of the life the poet wishes. Keats projects us into the scenes on a Grecian Urn so that for a brief moment the frozen images seem to live; but in the end, we are finally made aware of the difference between life and art. Berryman does something quite different from either Douglas's or Keats's poems; he relies more on what is left out of the poem, more on what the speaker refuses to acknowledge about his own situation:

The common title of the picture [Berryman said,<sup>1</sup>] is "Hunters in the Snow" and of course the poet knows this. But he pretends not to, and calls their [the three men's] spears (twice) 'poles', the resultant emotion being a certain stubborn incredulity -- as the hunters are loosed while the peaceful nations plunge again into war. This is not the subject of Brueghel's painting at all, and the interpretation of the event of the poem proves that the picture has merely provided necessary material, from a tranquil world, for what is necessary to be said -- but which the poet refuses to say -- about a violent world. 1

But it seems to me that the poet's refusal to say anything about the violent world is not so much the point as is his desire to control that hysterical world by means of projecting himself into a stasis. In this sense, Brueghel's painting becomes the poet's "objective correlative"; "in other words"; as Eliot said, "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked."<sup>2</sup> Something like Eliot's notion of the "objective correlative" is certainly what Berryman had in mind when he said that "the picture has merely provided necessary material..."

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1. Berryman, "One Answer to a Question," p.70.
  2. Eliot, "Hamlet," Selected Essays, p.145.

for what is necessary to be said." But just as it would be an injustice to apply only Eliot's idea of the "objective correlative" to his own poetry, we must also keep in mind his notion of the "auditory imagination," ("the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word...").<sup>1</sup> The conclusion, then, is that "Winter Landscape" is not a verbal equivalent to the painting, nor is it simply an object or formula which evokes an equivalent to the painting, nor is it simply an object or formula which evokes a feeling; it is the words, their arrangement, their meaning, the world of art they hook into, and their rhythms which animate and evoke the feeling of deep melancholy. And there are more direct debts to Eliot in "Winter Landscape." The notion of leaving things out and relying on the reader to note the irony of what is left out owes something to Eliot's reticence in "Journey of the Magi"; the Magus never mentions the star which he and the other two Wise Men (they are not called "Wise Men" either) followed. (Interestingly, perhaps significantly, Berryman's poem "The Disciple," published in late 1939, seems to counterpoint "Journey of the Magi.") And Eliot's methods are not all one hears in the poem; the phrase, "the evil waste of history/Outstretched" distinctly echoes Eliot's last lines to "Burnt Norton" (published five years before "Winter Landscape"): "Ridiculous the waste sad time/Stretching before and after."<sup>2</sup> But this is not a "lazy echo" as the British reviewer in the TLN noted about Berryman's use of influences in The Dispossessed. And further, simply because Berryman used Eliot's methods does not mean that "Winter Landscape" does not stand on its own; it has all of the "gentleness and delicacy and clarity," as Lowell has said, which make the poem notable in its own right.

1. Eliot, "Matthew Arnold," The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, pp.118-119.

2. T.S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton," The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1969), p.176.

Lowell also describes "Winter Landscape" as a "symbolic description" to which I would add the words "dynamic" and "empathic" in that the rhythms draw us into the static scene. And, too, Lowell points out the similarities between "Winter Landscape" and Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn," similarities, it seems to me, which Berryman meant us to have in mind. "Winter Landscape," Lowell observes,

is written in one sentence that loops through five five-line stanzas, as if it were trying to make a complete poem out of Keats's pictorial and next-to-last stanza in the "Grecian Urn." The old meaning is repeated by a darker, more imperiled voice. The music and imagery move with a relentless casualness. 1

The part of Keats's penultimate stanza to which Lowell refers is:

What little town by river or sea shore,  
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,  
Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?  
And little town, thy streets for evermore  
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell  
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

As Lowell suggests, it is as though Berryman were trying to make a complete poem out of this part of Keats's "Ode." But could it be that we are meant to have Keats's ode in mind throughout "Winter Landscape"? Like Keats's five parts of his Ode we have a similar structural symmetry in the five stanzas of "Winter Landscape"; and we hear verbal echoes of Keatsian diction in "brow" of a hill, "twilit street" and "thence." Is there not a similar description, and therefore ironic allusion, in Keats's "Bold Lover, never, never, canst thou kiss, / Though winning near the goal" and Berryman's "long companions they [the three men] can never reach"? J.M. Linebarger suggests that in comparing "Winter Landscape" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn" "Lowell has in mind... our sadness and desolation in remembrance of things past..." and, Linebarger says, "Winter Landscape" also suggests another theme of Keats's poem -- art is long, life is short."<sup>2</sup> These observations are true, but there are further points.

1. Lowell, "The Poetry of John Berryman," p.3.

2. J.M. Linebarger, John Berryman (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1974), p.43.

Berryman is not simply contrasting art and life, nor is he simply suggesting desolation in remembrance of things past; he goes beyond the picture itself to speculate on what will happen, and did, if "this particular three in brown" who "keep the scene... when all their company/will have been irrecoverably lost" are allowed to descend the winter hill they stand on. Unlike Keats's questioning, and not declaring, what the town was like from which these people came, Berryman is declaring in the present tense throughout that "this particular three" menacingly dominate the scene. And the further point is that Brueghel's painting "has merely provided the necessary material" to transform art into life; in this case art is life, "this particular three" <sup>actually</sup> may descend. But there is a paradox here, and the poet relies upon it. While this particular piece of art is in one sense life, it is also art, and the poet seems to wish that these sinister figures would never "descend." Beauty took Keats outside himself and for a brief moment he seemed to live in the scenes on the urn; but the reality of "political hysteria" has forced the poet of "Winter Landscape" outside himself and his situation and for a brief moment he too seems to live in art but in this case the more tranquil world of the painting. But, like Keats, he cannot do so and realizes it; just as Brueghel's painting of Winter would have been an emblem of Vulcan, the blacksmith who forged the weapons of many gods and heroes, so the "tall poles" have been forged into spears and the poet does not want to acknowledge it.

"Winter Landscape" sets the tone for the poems which follow after it; at the outset hysteria is not controlled, it is suppressed. In turn the poet's imagination is "dispossessed." In "Winter Landscape" the poet is like Lady Macbeth who cannot (or will not?) project imaginatively into the future to understand what murdering the king means -- triumph is followed by despondency and madness. The nightmarish world about everyone

in the early forties was real, too real, and the poet in "Winter Landscape" suffers from too much reality, what John Bayley elsewhere (in an essay on Auden) calls a "dispossessed imagination":

The dispossessed imagination may suffer from the lack of an intellectual tradition to set in order the experiences which impinge upon it. 1

It would seem, judging from "Winter Landscape," that the poet, though he suffers from a dispossessed imagination (like the characters in The Waste Land, he can "connect nothing with nothing" and does not wish to), would wish more for what Bayley calls "the adolescent imagination":

The adolescent imagination does not so suffer [as the dispossessed imagination does], because it is not called upon to judge what it experiences by any other standard than its own intensity. 2

It is as though the poet concentrates so intensely upon a painting that he will not be called upon to judge what he experiences; he is confining his experience to this one point of intensity, this static world of the painting. Ironically the poet becomes part of the adolescent imagination which he condemns in a later poem, "Boston Common": "war is the/Congress of adolescents, love in a mask,/Bestial and easy, issueless..." (T.D., p.64). Nevertheless, even when the poet would project himself into serenity, even when he would seem to wish for an adolescent imagination, he can neither ignore nor forget the outside world in his other poems; he never completely forces himself into a self-centered or solipsistic view of the world. For those who seem to be suspended in the waste land, and for the poet himself, the admonitions are the same: "Give, Sympathize, Control." The poet "gives" himself over to personal and deep relationships, as to his wife in "Canto Amor"; he "sympathizes" with others as in "The Ball Poem" and "On a London Train"; but "control" seems out of reach, and the volume ends with characters who are "The Dispossessed" and who, like Pirandello's Six Characters in

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1. Bayley, The Romantic Survival, p.133.
  2. Ibid.

Search of an Author, are in search of someone or something to bring things into an order.

The title poem "The Dispossessed" points to the reality of dispossession which Berryman felt "reaches deep into modern agony."

He said that he

began with, or at any rate worked with, both the opposite directions the notion of dispossession points to: the miserable, put out of one's own, and the relieved, saved, undevilled, de-spalled. The first is the more important, and the second need not be agreeable -- the devil cast out may be life. 1

With these notions of dispossession in mind let us turn to the poem:

'and something that.. that is theirs -- no longer ours'  
stammered to me the Italian page. A wood  
seeded & towered suddenly. I understood. --

The Leading Man's especially, and the Juvenile Lead's  
and the Leading Lady's thigh that switches & warms,  
and their grimaces, and their flying arms:

our arms, our story. Every seat was sold.  
A crone met in a clearing sprouts a beard  
and has a tirade. Not a word we heard.

Movement of stone within a woman's heart,  
abrupt & dominant. They gesture how  
fings really are. Rarely a child sings now.

My harpsichord weird as a koto drums  
adagio for twilight, for the storm-worn dove  
no more de-iced, and the spidery business of love.

The Juvenile Lead's the Leader's arm, one arm  
running the whole bole, branches, roots, (O watch)  
and the faceless fellow waving from her crotch,

Stalin-unanimous! who procured a vote  
and care not use it, who have kept an eye  
and care not use it, percussive vote, clear eye.

That which a captain and a weaponeer  
one day and one more day did, we did, sch  
we did not, They did.. can slid, the great lock

lodged, and no soul of us all was near was near, --  
an evil sky (where the umbrella b'comed)  
twirled its mustaches, hissed, the ingenue fumed,

poor virgin, and no hero rides. The race  
is done. Drifts through, between the cold, black trunks,  
the peachblow glory of the perishing sun

1. John Berryman, A Comment on "The Dispossessed", Post's Choice, eds. Paul Engle and Joseph Langland (New York: The Dial Press, 1962), p.136.

in empty houses where old things take place.

(T.D., pp.102-03).

The opening line indicates several of the difficulties "The Dispossessed" presents. We do not hear it immediately the way we hear the somber clarity of "Winter Landscape"; the style is darting, hesitating, almost stuttering; but the poem relies less on rhythm and more on the notion of the relation between drama and life. The opening line suggests a complex matrix of possibilities; it is taken from Luigi Pirandello's play Six Characters in Search of an Author in which Pirandello explores the differences between, but more the similarities between, life and art -- art is life, drama is experience. Eliot would have perhaps used the line from Six Characters as an epigraph, as he used a passage from the "Inferno" at the beginning of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," to indicate an irony of present and past, or more as a point of departure. Berryman's opening line is more like Eliot's quotation from Lancelot Andrews's sermon which begins "Journey of the Magi" or like his quotation from Edward Fitzgerald's letters which starts off "Gerontion," which dissolve into the poem. But the essential method in Berryman's poem is that we are meant to be brought into a drama like that of Pirandello's in which we create and have created our own play; there is no script, as Olive Schreiner said, the characters are not "marshalled" and "ticketed" for "this is the life we all lead."<sup>1</sup> And, finally, Berryman's ambiguously shifting pronouns in the first line, the device he said he learned in "The Ball Poem," puzzle us, who are "theirs" and "ours"? As the poem unfolds, the pronouns shift from "I" to "we" to "they" to each character himself, and these shifting pronouns suggested the device Berryman learned in "The Ball Poem," "a pronoun may seem a small matter, but she matters, he matters, it matters, they matter."<sup>2</sup> We are confronted once again "with a process of life and a process of art"; the reader is forced, as Berryman said of pronouns in The Dream Songs, into being more aware and entering into himself.<sup>3</sup> This time

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1. Schreiner, The Story of an African Farm, p.7.
  2. Berryman, "One Answer to a Question," p.71.
  3. Howard, "Whisky and Ink, Whisky and Ink," p.76.

the poet is neither projecting himself nor the reader into the stasis of a painting; hysteria has broken loose: the figures move into "us," they are living, and we must bear the consequences of the turbulence of our living. I shall return to this essentially dramatic method and in particular to Pirandello's play, but let us first look carefully at the "difficult" rhythms of the poem.

Though the style hesitates and takes short angles, lines break at logical pauses. For example, "A crone met in a clearing sprouts a bear<sup>d</sup> and has a tirade," or "Movement of stone within a woman's heart,/ abrupt & dominant." The tercets throughout are a variation upon the terza rima as in "Canto Amor" ("The Lightning" also varies the terza rima). The rhyme scheme in "The Dispossessed" does not hook one stanza into the next, but rather the second and third lines rhyme, a kind of ironic heroic couplet (the lines vary between ten and twelve syllables); thus, the rhyme scheme: abb, cdd, eff, ghh, and so on until the last tercet where the last line-stanza rounds out the poem as terza rima might: stu, s. So there is a kind of underlying order in a poem which enacts a chaotic world. But order is often turned on its head; rhymes are often ironic: "watch" and "crotch," "wood" and "understood," "bloomed" and "fumed." Though harmony is suggested in the full rhyme of "dove" and "love," the dove is "storm-worn" and love is a "spidery business." Internal rhymes have the same ironic and darkly humorous effect: "word" and "beard," "fings" and "sings," and "whole bole." John Frederick Nims has observed that the method of "The Dispossessed" is to make us feel chaos, but

one can say only a certain chaoticism, because nothing, not even disorder, is expressed by complete disorder. On the other hand, if this were a perfectly cool and lucid poem, it might give the impression that the poet is not really involved in his material -- that he was simply the observing spectator. But the experience with which Mr. Berryman is concerned goes deep; it infects not only the external world but even the style of the poet. 1

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1. John Frederick Nims, Comment on "The Dispossessed" Poetry: A Critical Supplement (April 1948), 1-2.

No narrative holds the poem together, but it does make sense in blocks. The first three stanzas tell us that the poet, who is no longer completely anonymous as in "Winter Landscape" but in the poem with "them" and "us," is reading Pirandello's play Six Characters in Search of an Author, and one line seems to tell him something about his present time, which is after World War II and after the two atomic bombs have been dropped. At the outset of the poem the suggestion is that art has become life. The first stanza is reminiscent of Dante's opening to Divine Comedy (the "Italian page"), his "dark wood," but in "The Dispossessed" the "seed" we might expect to "flower" instead "towered suddenly." Mr. Nims points out that the subject of the first sentence, "page" is ambiguous (i.e. "the printed page" or "page boy"). Nims rightly suggests that the ambiguity is not all that important to our understanding of the poem, but, he adds, it is significant that "we are troubled by a teasing uncertainty on the very threshold of the poem."<sup>1</sup> We are confronted with what the poet has "heard" and "understood," the implication being that his imagination is neither "dispossessed" nor is it "adolescent"; the poet is aware. So we are all in a play; at first we watch the actors' "grimaces, and their flying arms"; the poet means to include us all, "our arms, our story." Again Nims is helpful on the turn the poem is beginning to take:

... it soon becomes evident that this is a poem about political realities; in the light of that awareness we glance again at "Italian" of the first stanza. And remembering that "Fuehrer" and "duce" both mean "leader" we may determine the identification of the leading actors of the second stanza. If we accept this hint, the poem begins to take on a militaristic coloring, in which "grimaces" of the sixth line may metamorphose into "grimaces" and "flying arms" may be both wild salutes and the instruments of warfare.<sup>2</sup>

Nims also suggests that "Every seat was sold" suggests a terrible ambiguity: "seats" may be political seats (Parliament, etc.), and that they are "sold" suggests treason -- all integrity is lost. Nevertheless, the first two

1. Ibid., p.2.

2. Ibid., p.3.

stanzas are clearly alluding to Pirandello's play; and though there are political overtones, it is not until later in the poem that we may read back and see the ambiguity of the allusion to the "Leading Man." The third stanza continues with a puzzling reference, "A crone met in a clearing sprouts a beard/and has a tirade." As with several references in the poem, it seems that we are meant to respond to a feeling rather than to a logical sense. This image of a withered old lady sprouting a beard suggests an image of grotesqueness. Perhaps she is meant to suggest a Tiresias figure: she would appear to be both male (a beard) and female (a crone), and her "tirade" might be because "not a word we heard" of her prophecy.

The first three stanzas take us from the play on the printed page, to an imaginary performance, to "us" who watch but who will become the play. The fourth stanza shifts to the present tense; the play continues. "Movement of stone within a woman's heart,/abrupt & dominant," again a statement that seems to be more suggestive than specific; it would seem to be an image of the response, "Not a word we heard." But actually the players "gesture how/fings really are"; we are now in the play. "Fings"<sup>1</sup> might be baby talk which would suggest an "adolescent imagination" that does not suffer because it does not judge what it experiences: "something that... that is theirs -- no longer ours." But "fings" also might be taken from the Latin verb fingo, to shape, fashion, form, mold. Though "fings" is used as a noun (the noun of fingo is fictus -- feigned, false) the connotations are clearly that the artificial expression, the form or mould of the play, and the people in the play "gesture how/fings really are." How things really are is that "rarely a child sings now"; innocence, happiness, and harmony are nearly lost. The fifth stanza concludes the first half of the poem; now the poet speaks, and he tells us about the method of his poem: his poem is a "harpsichord," a dated and obsolete instrument, as Mr. Nims suggests, but it is also like

1. "Fings" is also Cockney English for "things."

a "koto" which is still heard; in fact, it is the national instrument of Japan (the responsibility, or rather irresponsibility, of dropping two atomic bombs on Japan will be an important point several stanzas later). The Japanese "hear" the poet's dated harpsichord because they have experienced what he says and what we all have enacted. The poet's harpsichord "drums/adagio," a sort of dirge, for the "storm-worn dove" of peace. The dove is, as Mr. Nims suggests, "telescoped with... a modern flying machine which requires de-icing in storm; the statement that it is 'no more de-iced' means either that there is no need of it being de-iced or (more probably) that for want of de-icing it goes to destruction."<sup>1</sup> Such a "dove" indeed would make love a "spidery business."

The poet returns to references to the Juvenile Lead and the Leading Man in the sixth stanza. By now references to World War II begin to make better sense. The references are fairly specific, almost allegorical, the Leading Man suggesting Hitler and the Leading Lady, whose "thigh switches & warms" suggesting Eva Braun. The Juvenile Lead is less specific: he might suggest Goring who became the "Leader's arm, one arm/running the whole bole," but the Juvenile Lead seems to suggest more the adolescent imagination. (By implication, the "Juvenile Lead's ... running the whole bole, branches, roofs" suggests Dante's wood of suicides.) It is the mature imagination that has been dispossessed, that is "put out of one's own," as Berryman said, and the result is that "the devil cast out is life."<sup>2</sup> The adolescent imagination is really the Leader's (Hitler's) strong arm, and he has bred a "faceless fellow" who is "Stalin-unanimous"; all of "us" are of one accord; Stalin has replaced the "Leading Men." The offspring of the "Leading Men" is irresponsible; the free vote is a "percussive vote," and "percussive" recalls the poet's "koto" drumming.

Finally, in the eighth stanza, the poet comes to what he has been building towards -- a manifestation, the manifestation, of human

1. Ibid., p.4.

2. Berryman, [A Comment on "The Dispossessed"], p.136.

irresponsibility in our dropping the atomic bombs: "That which a captain and a weaponeer/one day and one day more did..." (the two atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki). The poet uses the suggestive word, "weaponeer" rather than "bombardier," reminding us that a "weapon" was used. Then an ironic German interjection "ach" signals a protest: we did not drop the atomic bomb, "They [the Germans] did," they forced us into it. The description of preparing to drop the atomic bomb is a terrible perversion of a sexual act ("cam slid, the great lock/lodged"), and is appropriate for what is produced, a grotesque and faceless irresponsibility; the great cloud of the bomb is an "umbrella"<sup>1</sup> which ironically blooms for it is neither protection nor a flower. But we are not responsible; we were not near. The great evil of the atomic holocaust is reduced to a melodrama in which "an evil sky... twirled its mustaches" and seduces naive innocence ("the ingenué," "poor virgin"). No heroism in that ("no hero rides"). And so the "race/is done," meaning both the "race" to finish the war and the "race" of man. The landscape is bleak; the "wood" of understanding, sympathizing, and controlling the poet faintly suggested in the first stanza is now a wood of "cold black trunks." The "Juvenile Lead" of the adolescent imagination is "running the whole bole" (i.e. the trunk of a tree). The "peachblow" of the atomic bomb is no fruit to pick; the sun is perished, and the houses are empty. The "old things" which "take place" are primitive; humanity has regressed to where it started.

The poet is implying that in casting out the devil of our own lives we have cast out life. The poet himself suffers from a "dispossessed imagination"; he finds no intellectual or human tradition to set in order the experiences which now impinge upon his imagination. The point of the whole poem is perhaps best summarized by Berryman himself. When he was asked to

1. Nims suggests that "the umbrella is not itself but a statesman /Neville Chamberlin/ famous for carrying one, he will guess who the 'ingenué', or young naive one, is in this dream of nations." Nims, p.5.

write about "The State of American Writing, 1948," he seemed to take the occasion to state in prose what he had already attempted to say in this poem. He said that the forties was a "decade of survival," and that as a result there had been "a political, perhaps a moral, paralysis." He went on to distinguish between "guilt" and "bad conscience"; "everybody is 'guilty' of everything, and that is that," but "bad conscience is more serious":

Few men of reflection can be satisfied now with their actions and attitudes during the recent war. Well, we put that aside: the Enemy was clear, and moreover what happened (producing what is happening now) would have happened anyway, "It was done for us" -- your modern intellectual is astonishingly fatalistic. This is the view generally taken, with a gain in uneasiness, of the use of the atomic bomb. But few men of reflection can be satisfied with their actions and attitudes now. Well, again the Enemy is clear (Stalin for Hitler), what is happening cannot be influenced by us, and so on. That is, men of reflection are reconciled, in their degree to their past and their present. The trouble is the future: what they -- or what They for them -- are going to <sup>be</sup> doing in the months and years and days to come. This is the trouble. In order to be reconciled to this, one would have to learn to be reconciled beforehand to an atrocious crime one might well soon commit without having the slightest wish to commit it; and that, I suppose, is out of the question. So that men who can think and are moral must stand ready night and day to the orders of blind evil. What has created this is an usurpation which is not complete: usurpation of individual decision, which yet leaves the individual nominally free -- and of course actually free if he happens to be a hero. But literary men are seldom heroes, and heroes of this sort, at present, as soon as they announce themselves, cease anyway to be literary men. 1

Now "The Dispossessed" is a literary work and is obviously addressed to those who think; its very difficulty calls upon a thinking audience. But it should be made clear that Berryman's poem does not appeal to the intellect alone; his method and his allusions attempt to dissolve rational arguments into realities; the intellect is suffused with reality. It might very well be a mistake to attempt to tease out

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1. John Berryman, Answers to "The State of American Writing, 1948: Seven Questions," Partisan Review, 15 (August 1948), 856-57. Berryman's sense of our "bad conscience" was again emphasized in the notes to his unfinished novel Recovery and in an unpublished letter to The New York Times, also in Recovery. See pp.235-37. In his letter, Berryman said in a metaphor of the stage: "so no American is off any hook, fellow actors. The hook is thick and dug deep.... We are obliged to hold ourselves responsible not only for a decade of Asiatic corpses /i.e. the Viet Nam war/ and uninhabitable countryside and genocidal 'resettlement' of whole populations of Asiatic villagers, but for what we are doing to the survivors...." Recovery (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1973), pp.236-37.

nearly every phrase as I have done, for like The Waste Land, once we know all of the "facts" we must forget them. Both poems in the end are "tone" poems, poems which attempt to create a sense of the human condition after global wars. As the Father says in Six Characters in Search of an Author: "Literature indeed! This is life!"<sup>1</sup> This returns us to Berryman's poetic of art becoming life, and we have seen how Berryman's two basic methods rhythm (that is, simple and complex rhythms) and dramatization do so. The dramatic dimension of "The Dispossessed" goes much deeper into Pirandello's play than I have indicated; very briefly, I shall sketch out this dimension.

Six Characters in Search of an Author, like Shakespeare's plays and like Olive Schreiner's notion of drama's being "the life we all lead," is a drama of experience, a penetration into a literary type of "realism" in order to arrive at reality. Pirandello's sub-title gives the clue, A Play in the Making, an attempt to break down the barrier between art and reality. The plot of the play is simple: some actors in a company are rehearsing a play (ironically Pirandello's own earlier play The Game as He Played It); six people interrupt the rehearsals, convince the producer that he does not need a script and that with his help they can create their own play. There is much discussion as to what and who should make up the play they will improvise; they settle upon nothing, but in the end their discussions and conflicts over creating a play, create the play in spite of their disagreements. Nevertheless the events are so real that the "actors" do not believe that a murder and a suicide have taken place:

Leading Men: What do you mean, dead? It's  
all make-believe! It's all just a  
pretence! Don't get taken in by it!

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1. Luigi Pirandello, Six Characters in Search of an Author, trans. Frederick May (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1954), p.21.

Other Actors: Make-believe? Pretence? Reality!  
Reality! He's dead! 1

The Father has the last say (in effect he has been the "Father" of the play and has been the "real" character who has usurped the Leading Man's role). When all the others desperately say, "No! Make-believe! It's all pretence!" the Father answers: "What do you mean, pretence? Reality, ladies and gentlemen, reality! Reality!"<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the play we have been made aware that the "Six Characters" and the "Actors" are not to be confused: the "Characters" are "created realities" and the "Actors" are "ever-changing" in their "pretended" roles, Pirandello tells us. But the idea of "roles" in the six characters of "created reality" is complex indeed:

Father: The drama is in us. We are the drama and we are impatient to act it -- so fiercely does our inner passion urge us on.<sup>3</sup>

Later the Father expands on what he means by "the drama within us":

My drama lies entirely in this one thing.... In my being conscious that each one of us believes himself to be a single person. But it's not true.... Each one of us is many persons.... Many persons... according to all the possibilities of being that there are within us.... With some people we are one person.... With others we are somebody quite different.... And all the time under the illusion of always being one and the same person for everybody.... We believe that we are always this one person in whatever it is we may be doing. But it's not true! It's not true! And we see this very clearly when by some tragic chance we are, as it were, caught up whilst in the middle of doing something and find ourselves suspended in mid air. And then we perceive that all of us was not in what we were doing, and that it would, therefore, be an atrocious injustice to us to judge us by that action alone. 4

As in Six Characters, the "we" and "they" and even the "I" of "The Dispossessed" are in effect "caught up whilst in mid air" (as Henry in The Dream Songs often feels caught up in the middle of things). It

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1. Pirandello, Six Characters In Search of an Author, p.68.
  2. Ibid., p.69.
  3. Ibid., p.11.
  4. Ibid., p.25. This is another way of saying that our individual identities are variations upon the self, which I discussed in Keats's idea of identity: "Not merely is the Heart a Hornbook, It is the Minds Bible, It is the Minds Experience, it is the test from which the Mind or intelligence sucks its identity." Forman, ed., Letters, p.336.

might very well be an "atrocious injustice" to judge "the dispossessed" by two acts of irresponsibility, but in this case our judgement is reserved; we are looking through the eyes of the poet, at the consequences of an action. In the play just before the Father speaks the opening line of "The Dispossessed," "and something that... that is theirs... no longer ours,"<sup>1</sup> he said that he admired the actors (the Leading Man and the Leading Lady), "But... Well... The truth is... They're certainly not us!"<sup>2</sup>

So what the poet of "The Dispossessed" suddenly understands is that the Leading Man, the Juvenile Lead, and the Leading Lady are all actors who play different roles which are not themselves; they play the parts they are given, not the parts they themselves create, and therefore they are not responsible for what they do. The poet feels that if this notion is applied to the life we all lead, then we may be deceived into thinking that we are not responsible for our own actions; our roles are given to us, so that when we drop the atomic bomb we can say, "we did not, They did...." Perhaps the "living" dramatic method and the angular style of "The Dispossessed" was best summarized by Pirandello when he defined his ideal of dramatic dialogue as

spoken action, living words that move immediate expressions inseparable from action, unique phrases that cannot be changed to any other and belong to a definite character in a definite situation; in short, words, expressions, phrases impossible to invent but born when the author has identified himself with his creature to the point of seeing it only as it sees itself. 3

I suggested at the outset of this section that though the poems in The Dispossessed are roughly arranged chronologically, Berryman shifted

1. Ibid., p.48. I have not been able to find the translation Berryman used. The translation I am using reads, "Something that becomes theirs... And no longer ours."
2. Ibid.
3. Cited by Andrew Kennedy, Six Dramatists in Search of a Language (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p.18.

the chronological order of enough poems to indicate that he intended a "rhythm set," as he would do again later in Love & Fame. Berryman said that he came to see himself as an epic poet after he had written Honage to Mistress Bradstreet and The Dream Songs, but his thinking, I believe, was inclining towards the long poem even in 1948 when The Dispossessed was published. I am not suggesting that The Dispossessed is a long poem, but rather, that the volume should be seen as a sequence of lyrics just as Berryman's Sonnets should be regarded as a sequence. The Sonnets are one clue to Berryman's thinking about sequences during this time, for they were written in 1947, a year before The Dispossessed was published. Another indication of Berryman's frame of mind during this time was his plan to write a long poem about the Jews who died in Poland; it was to be similar to a Bach fugue<sup>1</sup> and in forty-two sections, parts of which were published in 1950, but he abandoned the work. And finally, Berryman's first long poem, Honage to Mistress Bradstreet, was begun in 1948, though admittedly he did not at the time realize that he had begun a long poem and did not complete Honage till five years later.<sup>2</sup> But the most convincing evidence that Berryman had something like a sequence or a "rhythm set" in mind as he arranged the poems of The Dispossessed may be found in his introductory "Note" to the volume: "With exceptions for a thematic reason, affecting Section One, the poems stand in what was roughly their order of writing" (T.D., p.vii). Revealing word, "section," it would indicate that Berryman saw the volume as a whole. Though the earliest poem was published in 1939 and the last in 1948, "a thematic reason" dictated that Section One set the whole volume in motion.

1. Interestingly Yeats had said in his introduction to A Vision ("A Packet for Ezra Pound") that Pound saw his Cantos as having no structure but "display a structure like that of a Bach Fugue." W.B. Yeats, A Vision (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1962), p.4.
2. McClelland, et al., "An Interview with John Berryman," p.7. See also Stitt, "The Art of Poetry: An Interview with John Berryman," pp.194-95.

Berryman said that his model for Homage to Mistress Bradstreet was The Waste Land but that Homage was as "unlike The Waste Land as possible"<sup>1</sup> for him to be. (He had in mind the clear dominance of personality and sense of narrative that Homage relies on.) I would suggest that The Waste Land might very well have been in his mind from time to time as he wrote, but seems to have definitely been in his mind as he arranged the poems of The Dispossessed. The only structural similarity between the two is that they are both arranged in five parts; but the method, voice and themes point to the strongest similarities between them. As in The Waste Land, a number of "dispossessed" voices, none of whom can connect nothing with nothing, tell their own sad story (for example, "The Disciple" and "The Nervous Songs"). The effect of these different speaking voices is one of fragmentation, but the fragments of The Waste Land and The Dispossessed may be read like Madame Sosostris's "wicked pack of cards"; the "cards" are interpreted as they fall into a sequence. It must be more on thematic and historical grounds that The Waste Land and The Dispossessed are said to be most similar: both were written during and after global wars; both owe much to personal crises each poet was suffering at the time; both are poetic records of the disillusionment, spiritual aridity, and disruptive chaos of their times; both reflect the great sense of loss (both personal and universal), the senseless violence, the dehumanization of man and his alienation from society and the past; and both suggest similar ways out of the wasteland: love and compassion -- "Give, Sympathize, Control."

Robert Lowell has observed that even in the forties Berryman "seemed to throb with a singular rhythm and pitch."<sup>2</sup> It is this throbbing, rhythmic singularity which draws the parts of The Dispossessed into a whole,

1. Stitt, "The Art of Poetry: An Interview with John Berryman," p.190.

2. Lowell, "The Poetry of John Berryman," p.3.

a singularity of weight and import, a singularity of the rhythms of sound and theme coalescing with meaning and feeling. So thematic and historical resonance are ways to approach the unity of The Dispossessed. Another approach is stylistic rhythm, which I have suggested already, in which the clear, somber cadences of the early poems angle into a nervousness, the music switches from adagio to pizzicato. Given that during this time Berryman was "vibrating brilliantly to all significant influences"<sup>1</sup> as Lowell has said, it would not be entirely accurate to say Berryman intended that his rhythms should lurch in such a way as to give a calculated sense of things falling apart, but the design is there nevertheless.<sup>2</sup> Still a third approach to the singularity and wholeness of The Dispossessed would be its flow of recurring images. As in The Waste Land images of sterility and suspension tend to dominate; cold, winter, evening, night, the moon; and these are set in tension with images of new life and movement: spring, summer, dawn, wind, the sun. Out of this imagistic tension a rhythm penetrates and exemplifies the "deep structures" of the whole.

Before we turn to the various rhythmic movements of The Dispossessed, I should like to return to the historical context of the volume and consider some of the difficulties of writing serious poetry about an "age of anxiety" and survival. Berryman himself best summarized the burden of writing poetry of his time in a note on "War and Poetry" published in an anthology of twentieth century war poetry (1945):

I should be sorry if the relation between one of man's most destructive and witless activities [war] and one of his more purely and intelligently creative activities [poetry] should

1. Lowell, "The Poetry of John Berryman," p.3.
2. J.M. Linebarger has observed "three fairly distinct styles" in The Dispossessed: "One is based on the Yeats-Auden influence, as in 'The Statue' or 'Boston Common'; the others are best illustrated by the first poem and the last poem of The Dispossessed." John Berryman, p.52.

seem to be very close or satisfactory. I do not think it has to be so, -- is less and less, as war loses its human countenance and living is hard enough. But poetry is not civilized. It takes its themes where it finds them, and some permanently interesting to it are thrown up by the war: fear, departure, courage, loss, ambition, loyalty, intrigue, madness, faith and death. Whether its themes will engage the poetry of a particular man is another matter. There are not many poets, and there are no rules. War is an experience, worse than most, like illness or a journey or belief or marriage; those who "have" it will be affected in different degrees, in different ways; some trained in speech will talk about it, others trained equally and affected strongly will have nothing to say; those affected most -- the dead -- will be most silent. 1

These are melancholy themes which radiate few possibilities of hope, and to write about these dark themes is in effect to begin to repeat oneself; there is no choice. Northrop Frye, reviewing a short collection of Berryman's poems in 1942, expressed the poet's and the reader's dilemma in the state of poetry of that time:

The similarity of all these lyrics [about the war] in tone, mood, subject and form is so oppressive that the strain of trying to find something to say about two or more contributions is getting me down. 2

Then there is, in Berryman's case, the problem of how much the poet really knows about what is going on, how convincing his experience of the war is if he is not in the fighting (Berryman was not in the armed forces because of a physical disability).<sup>3</sup> Frye continues:

1. John Berryman, "On War and Poetry," The War Poets: An Anthology of the War Poetry of the 20th Century, ed. Oscar Williams (New York: The John Day Company, 1945), pp.29-30.
2. Northrop Frye, "Books of the Month," The Canadian Forum (October 1942), 220.
3. There is something about one's sympathy over long distances which rings both true and false: true in that we would wish for the humanness that comes with sympathy for someone else's suffering but false in that one does not really endure the physical suffering. It may be very well, as Keats said, that imaginary woes are worse than real ones. But if the poet is to write about real pain and real suffering, his poetry would seem more genuine if he himself has offered the same wounds. When a civilian war poet writes through second-hand experience, it is not to say that he cannot convincingly project into the suffering in war (witness Stephen Crane's The Red Badge of Courage). But the more important point is that if the poet is to write about "life" then carnage is only part of life as Edwin Murr has said in "Reading in War Time":

Boswell's turbulent friend/And his deafening verbal strife/Ivan Ilych's death/Tell me more about life,/Both being personal,/Than all the carnage can.

All the average poet knows about war and Fascism is what he sees in the papers. Yet he feels that he should be much subtler and more profound, that it is his duty to be prophetic, to have a deeper insight into imaginative values than the reporter or civil servant.... He [the poet] is so anxious for the good of humanity, but is too keenly aware of its actual or latent menaces to be confident or loyal to it. 1

And of course Frye is right. A poem like Berryman's "World-Telegram" draws upon the events reported on one day, and, the poet concludes: "If it were possible to take these things/Quite seriously, I believe they might/ Carry disorder in the strongest brain..." (T.D., p.32). Or again, Berryman based a poem on a news item about an Australian officer "who lost an eye in action in Syria and was awarded the Military Cross for gallantry in action." Later he "was handed a white feather [a symbol of cowardice] by a young woman as he walked along the street in civilian clothes"; the officer said nothing and "dropped his glass eye in the woman's hand."<sup>2</sup> In "White Feather" Berryman appeals to the reader to see beyond the simple event, beyond the facts of the report: "Imagine a crowded war-time street"; "See as little as I"; Try/To make out this man who was going by" (T.D., p.58). But it should be noted that though Berryman would imitate in other poems Yeats's rhetorical, prophetic manner, the subject of these two poems is sympathy and the limits of sympathy, something more individual and personally felt than Berryman's Yeatsian "chuffing sea/Far off like the rough of beast nearby... (T.D., p.88).

In part, Berryman's dilemma of what poetic manner to adopt in the forties had much to do with the kind of poetry which had been written in the twenties and thirties. The combined talents of Yeats, Eliot, and Auden did much to set the standard. "By 1935," Berryman said in 1948, "the Auden climate had set in strongly. Poetry became ominous, flat,

1. Ibid.

2. The "news item" appears as an epigraph to the magazine publication of "The White Feather" but not in "White Feather" in The Dispossessed. See The Nation, CLIV (May, 16, 1942), 574.

and social; elliptical and indistinctly allusive; casual in tone and form, frightening in import."<sup>1</sup> And Berryman's poetry fell in line.

Berryman had noted in 1947 that the poetry of Robert Lowell was the beginning of a break with the Auden manner:

The author of a very interesting lead article recently in The Times Literary Supplement, taking The Orators as the key book of the thirties, mentions in his conclusion the fact that writers of the period, young and old, "preferred to precision of design and execution an approximate; a general feeling arose that careful finish was in some way base... the brilliant improvisation became a standard instead of an adventure." This is so just.... But Mr. Lowell's poetry is the most decisive testimony we have had, I think, of a new period, returning to the deliberate and the formal. In other respects, it is true, the break is incomplete. Our best work is still difficult, allusive, and more or less didactic in intention. 2

Such had been Berryman's break with "brilliant improvisation," not always with the best results, but with a sense of making old forms new. Berryman strongly criticized the poems of Laurie Lee (1948) for taking it "easy metrically" and "obeying his impulses": "in short, he [Lee] has only diction and images as tools, and what he can learn or impart is rather limited."<sup>3</sup> Berryman went on to say that stanzas in Lee's poems "could be shifted from poem to poem without notice or disturbance if one did it cunningly."<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, Yvor Winters said the same things about The Dispossessed: "It is hard to tell one poem from another; the poems blur together in the memory; and much of the time the passages from different poems could be interchanged with no great change of effect."<sup>5</sup> Winters did not risk illustrating his point; had he done so, he would have perhaps realized that he was speaking of recurring images rather than similar styles or forms. Take for example two poems which borrow from

1. John Berryman, "Waiting for the End, Boys," Partisan Review, XV (February 1948), 254.
2. Berryman, "Lowell, Thomas & Co.," p.70, p.80.
3. Berryman, "Waiting for the End, Boys," p.258.
4. Ibid.
5. Winters, "Three Poets," p.404.

terza rima, but which are decidedly disparate in style, rhythm, and emphasis:

Dance for this music, Mistress to music dear,  
more, that storm worries the disordered wood  
grieving the midnight of my thirtieth year....

(T.D., p.73)

Obstinate, gleams from the black world the gay and fair,  
My love loves chocolate, she loves also me,  
And the lightning dances, but I cannot despair.

(T.D., p.84)

Understatement displaces elegance ("My love loves chocolate, she loves also me" and "Mistress to music dear"); vivid detail displaces fuzzy suggestion ("gleams from the black world" and "disordered wood") and simple directness displaces suggestive indirectness ("I cannot despair" and "grieving the midnight of my thirtieth year"). The monotony Winters saw in The Dispossessed must be accounted for by the oppressive mood of the times Berryman felt and expressed, not by any lack of variation in his style. If Berryman used conventional form, as he did in his Sonnets, he attempted to make it as much his own as possible. Berryman saw two alternatives in using an established form like the sonnet:

We may write a sonnet, say, but for God's sake let it be as little like a sonnet as possible: appear to take it easy. Tate's frightful wrenchings in his early sonnets, producing sometimes similar effects, proceeded from an exactly opposite desire: not to take it easy. Either programme, it goes without saying, could be fruitful or sterile; I am not preferring one to the other. 1

Obviously Berryman chose the latter "frightful wrenchings" in his own sonnets, and the results, while not wholly successful, were fruitful.

Given Berryman's change and development of style and form in The Dispossessed we might find it an extremely difficult volume to discuss critically. Perhaps we should begin by allowing Berryman his donnée, to use Henry James's useful term, and then judge within that limitation. How

1. Berryman, "Waiting for the End, Boys," p.260.

successfully, we must ask ourselves, does Berryman translate into human terms the dark, frightening world of the times? Didactic platitudes come easy in a world gone mad, but poetry which brings to life one's feeling and experience is rare indeed. The poet cannot merely follow his impulses in penetrating either his own feeling or the world about him; though the adolescent imagination might have taken hold generally, his must be the mature imagination.

In part the way Berryman, or any poet penetrates and enacts his personal concerns and his concerns for the world about him is through his images. Some of the logical images for the deep melancholy, the sense of a devastation, sterility, and despair of the time (1938-1948) are darkness, winter, and cold. Berryman relied heavily upon these stark images; it would seem too heavily. But there is a considerable resonance of depth and variation in these images when we look closely at The Dispossessed; there are more than thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird or for that matter darkness. A further benefit of looking closely at how Berryman uses these stock images is to see the coherency, the rhythmic "deep structures" of the volume as a whole, pools which flow one into the other, the individual's responses resonating against the world he encounters. Northrop Frye felt that because the poet in the early forties was so "anxious for the good of humanity" he was "too keenly aware of its actual or latent menaces to be confident or loyal to it"; the result of this feeling, Frye said, was that the poet could not produce a coherent work: "His symbolism and imagery are therefore disjointed and shot out at random into the blue...."<sup>1</sup> I wonder if Frye would have said the same thing after his later study of archetypal patterns; certainly the dominant imagery of The Dispossessed does not suggest images

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1. Frye, "Books of the Month," p.220.

"shot out at random."

The world is so dark, cold, and wintry in the first three sections of The Dispossessed that we are given a sense of the poet and the world being like Dante's Satan stuck in ice, flapping his terrible wings so hard that he keeps himself frozen there. But by the last two sections, though the freezing conditions still exist, there are hopeful signs, small pools of a thaw and the hope of new life like Eliot's Magi coming down "to a temperate valley, / Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation."<sup>1</sup> Berryman sets the mood and reveals his concerns in Section One; thereafter, the rest of the volume is set into motion and resonates against its beginning. We have seen how in the first poem, "Winter Landscape," the poet sees the world as frozen in a painting, how he longs to escape from the chaotic world about him, and how he wishes to stop the tumbling world before it drops into darkness. But go outside to the world he must, and in the next poem, "The Statue," the poet turns his eye to people who pass by the statue of a military hero in a public park. The "Winter Landscape" of a painting is now transferred to a moving outside world; art is juxtaposed to life. The poet coolly, but sympathetically observes the scene:

Where I sit, near the entrance to the Park,  
The charming dangerous entrance to their need,  
Dozens, a hundred men have lain till morning  
And the preservative darkness waning,  
Waking to want, to the day before, desire  
For the ultimate good, Respect, to hunger waking;  
Like the statue ruined but without its eyes;  
Turned vaguely out at dawn for a new day.

(T.D., p.4)

The poet sees the darkness as being like art, it suspends and is "preservative," but unlike the "vision" of art, there is no vision in this scene. "Untidy" lives cannot see. Ironically the statue cannot see either, but on the other hand, its dignity, unlike those who pass by it, has been preserved; "Winters have not been able to alter the pride"

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1. Eliot, The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot, p.103.

of the imposing statue of a military hero.

But, the poet implies, the statue's pride is the wrong kind of pride, a pride born out of arrogance, not the simple dignity of humane respect. Such an arrogant pride, both in art and in life, would stare blankly over the "untidy Sunday throng." The poet sees that the "Sunday throng" (the poet calculatedly ignores whether or not they are coming or going from church) have lost sight too; they do not know where they are going; they have lost their dignity; they have lost sight of the past and cannot determine what the future holds. Like the voices in The Waste Land, their past means as little to them as their present and their future. "Fountains" and "natural life springing in May" are behind the poet not in front of him. Even lovers who should suggest the hope of new life are only concerned with their desire: "not one of them can know/Or care which Humboldt is immortalized" (T.D., p.5). A general condition of darkness covers all as the poem ends; no hope seems possible for the individual who is an anonymous "occupant" in "a dark apartment"; he is an "insignificant dreamer" whose only hope is death:

... one summer  
 Night an insignificant dreamer,  
 Defeated occupant, will close his eyes  
 Mercifully on the expensive drama  
 wherein he wasted so much skill, such faith,  
 And salvaged less than the intolerable statue.

(T.D., p.5)

In the next poem of Section One, one of the voices speaks out of the waste land, "The Disciple." Thus far the poet has allowed us to see others at a distance; now the disciple speaks and remembers Christ, but like the others he does not know what Christ's coming meant. "The Disciple" has been criticized by Ian Hamilton because it "borrows heavily"<sup>1</sup> from Eliot's "Journey of the Magi," but it seems to me that we are meant to

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1. Ian Hamilton, "John Berryman," The London Magazine, February 1965, p.94.

have Eliot's poem in mind. Berryman took a calculated risk that the reader will note the ironic differences between his "disciple" and Eliot's "magus." For example, note the differences between the disciple and the magus in the last stanza of each poem:

Great nonsense has been spoken of that time.  
 But I can tell you I saw then  
 A terrible darkness on the face of men,  
 His last astonishment; and now that I'm  
 Old I behold it as a young man yet.  
 None of us now knows what it means,  
 But to this day our loves and disciplines  
 Worry themselves there. We do not forget.

(T.D., p.7)

All this was a long time ago, I remember,  
 And I would do it again, but set down  
 This set down  
 This: were we led all that way for  
 Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,  
 We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,  
 But had thought they were different; this Birth was  
 Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.  
 We returned to our places, these kingdoms,  
 But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,  
 With an alien people clutching their gods.  
 I should be glad of another death. 1

The method, and at some points the tone, of these two stanzas are remarkably similar, but there are distinct differences between the disciple's and the magus's reaction to what happened to them. Eliot's magus kept and seemed to understand his revelation; he returned to "an alien people clutching their gods." But Berryman's disciple, who had a chance to see more of Christ's promise of fulfillment, still does not know what Christ's coming meant. The magus "had evidence and no doubt," but the disciple and all who witnessed Christ's miracles do not know "what it means." And the way Berryman's disciple tells his story is different as well. Eliot's manner is sustained and borders on being lofty; whereas Berryman's manner begins with parody and moves to simple statement. The disciple describes Christ as a "mage" who does tricks: "We saw him with a delicate length of string/

1. Eliot, The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot, p.104.

Hide coins and bring paper through flame" (T.D., p.6). But the "mage" is also a man of real power, in Yeats's sense, a man who raises people from the dead. And finally, each witness to Christ's presence concludes with a different resignation: the magus wishes to die but the disciple does not express such a desire; in a sense the magus feels that God's promise has been fulfilled, the disciple is not sure. To give Mr. Hamilton his due, he does praise "The Disciple" for its "direct simplicity and warmth," and admires the puzzling puns which "cluster and jostle" throughout, but, he concludes, "one could play for hours... without getting any closer to grasping the point of all this double-talk."<sup>1</sup> Might we not regard "double-talk" as the point? The disciple does say, "None of us now knows what it means"; the "terrible darkness on the face of men" at Christ's resurrection (or ascension?) is not all that astonishes them. Though Christ did "sing" to them "by candle-light," they are in a sense still in the dark; "the terrible darkness on the face of men" is ignorance of what has happened. They do, nevertheless, seem to sense that Christ's "compassion" (the word is repeated twice) is His light; indeed "compassion," as we shall see in later poems in The Dispossessed is <sup>one way</sup> for all to come out of the cold and the darkness, the only warmth and light.

In the next poem, "A Point of Age," we learn that the poet is twenty-five, and at that age he feels it is "a time to move away." The traveller will become increasingly important a figure in The Dispossessed, the implication being that by travelling one may eventually find his way below the snow line and out of the darkness. The traveller must leave and forget lost innocence ("The desolate childhood smokes on a dead hill" -- perhaps suggesting an unhappy childhood as well); if he is to get out of the darkness, he cannot stay in one place:

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1. Ibid.

The travelling hands upon the tower call,  
 The clock-face telescopes a long desire:  
 Out of the city as the autos steam  
 I watch, I whisper, Is it time.. time?  
 Fog is enveloping the bridges, lodgers  
 Shoulder and fist each other in the mire  
 Where later, leaves, untidy lives will fall.

(T.D., p.8)

Clearly the poet's voice is another voice out of The Waste Land: "Is it time.. time?" echoes "HURRY UP PLEASE, ITS TIME" (and also echoes Prufrock). Again the poet attempts to make sense out of "untidy lives," but there are so many, even friends, who stay "frozen" where they are:

Companions, travelers, by luck, by fault  
 Whose none can ever decide, friends I had  
 Have frozen back or slipped ahead or let  
 Landscape juggle their destinations, slut  
 Solace and drink drown the degraded eye.  
 The fog is settling and the night falls, sad,  
 Across the forward shadows where friends halt.

(T.D., p.8)

The poet must go it alone; he must attempt to determine his own fate and not let the landscape "juggle" his destination. Several images are beginning to cluster about the images of darkness and cold, those of fog and drink. Drink may offer "solace," but to remain frozen in drink is to be "degraded" like those men who sleep in the park. It is becoming clearer that to attempt to travel out of the dark is to assert one's dignity. But to show compassion as one travels is difficult in these times:

The Hero, haggard on the top of time,  
 Enacts his inconceivable woe and pride  
 Flunging his enemies down the mountainside,  
 Lesson and master. We are come to learn  
 Compassion from the last and piercing scream  
 Of who was lifted before he could die.

(T.D., p.10)

The "Hero" is not to be emulated; he is "Animal-and-Hero," his activities are of the night; because of him "the day/Darkens, and it is time to move away" (T.D., p.10). The poet suggests that "old friends unbolt the night wherein you roam," but he has not met them yet. And so "in storm and

gloom" the poet makes his "testament": "I bequeath my heart/To the disillusioned few who have wished me well" (T.D., p.10). Having set out on his journey he remains at a loss as to what to do and where to go: "What then to praise, what love, what look to have?" (T.D., p.12). His contemplation ends "A Point in Age" with an affirmation that the most he feels he can hope for is his dignity; he cannot return to innocence when the "sun shone/Gold once":

The animals who lightless live, alone  
 And dark die. We await the rising moon.  
 When the moon lifts, lagging winter moon,  
 Its white face over time where the sun shone  
 Gold once, we have a work to do, a grave  
 At last for the honourable and exhausted man.

(T.D., p.12)

Thus far we have seen that the darkness, the winter, and the frozen condition which the poet experiences are both individual and universal. It is a world of loss, and it would remain Berryman's major theme throughout his career: the loss of a heroic world, of innocence, of friends, of stability, of love, of compassion, of responsibility, of dignity, of the will, of the imagination, of individuality. In The Dispossessed the poet will attempt to do something about these losses; he cannot overcome them all or even a few of them, but in the process of travelling out of the darkness, he hopes to regain a small measure of dignity, perhaps the most any man can hope for, a kind of dignity which is based on responsibility, mature imagination, compassion, will, and love.

The next poem of Section One continues with the figure of the traveller attempting to get out of the darkness. "The Traveller" himself is singled out as odd because he travels at all. He takes the same train as everyone else; they appear to look the same as he and to be travelling to the same destination; but the poet seems different: he has "a curious way of holding his head" (T.D., p.13). The difference is that he studies

"maps," apparently unlike the others. (In the previous poem he has hinted at the kind of "maps" he has in mind: "Odysseys I examine, bed on board, / Heartbreak familiar as the heart is strange (T.D., p.87.) As a poet, he tries to name things: "I tried to name / The effects of motion on the travellers" (T.D., p.13). He is beginning to focus on life not art, on what is immediate, what he can see and experience of other persons. He does not allow himself to be overwhelmed by the "untidy throngs"; he watches a couple he "could see." Imagery is noticeably absent throughout the poem; the poet speaks directly and simply in his feeling for the couple:

... the curse  
And blessings of that couple, their destination,  
The deception practised on them at the station,  
Their courage.

(T.D., p.13).

When the train stopped all "knew" and the poet "descended too." Throughout The Dispossessed, "descending" and "climbing" are associated with travelling; perhaps these associations are meant to allude to Dante's journey, his descent into the "Inferno" and his ascent to Paradise. In "The Traveller" we have our first hint that the poet is beginning to see individuals rather than masses; he is beginning to show the "compassion" that the disciple saw in Christ; his feelings are specific, not dissipated in safe generalities.

The poet returns to the theme of loss in "The Ball Poem," in this case the loss of a kind of childhood innocence in which a boy "senses first responsibility / In a world of possessions" (T.D., p.14); both the boy and the poet are learning "the epistemology of loss." Coupled with this loss is an assumption of responsibility; the boy, similar in a way to those others the poet has observed, is at the threshold of responsibility, but the boy is unlike the others in that they have had chances of being responsible but have failed. Perhaps the boy will succeed. The "epistemology of loss" (the grounds and nature of loss with reference to its limits and validity) are part of the poet's darkness as well as

the boy's: the boy will learn, and therefore assert his dignity, "how to stand up"; gradually, "light will return to the street." The poet himself shows compassion as "part" of him explores "the deep and dark/ Floor of the harbour" where the boy lost the ball and where, metaphorically speaking, the deepest recesses of his feelings and compassion lie.

Section One ends with another traveller poem, "Fare Well." The break in the word "farewell" is significant: "fare" calls attention to the traveller's cost of conveyance, to his "bill of fare"; it suggests the journey he has set out upon, his leave-taking; and the break suggests that the traveller hopes for parting good wishes. But it is still a wintry climate as the poem begins,

Motions of waiving trouble winter air,  
I wonder, and his face as it were forms  
Solemn, canorous, under the howled alarms,--  
The eyes shadowed and shut.  
Certainly for this sort of thing it is very late,  
I shudder while my love longs and I pour  
My bright eyes towards the moving shadow .. where?

(T.D., p.15)

The poet is still alone; he seems to accept that "what has been taken away will not return"; but he still longs to return to the womb, to first innocence, and he complains bitterly that he knows about this innocence at all:

What has been taken away should not have been shown,  
I complain, torturing, and then withdrawn.  
After so long, can I still long so and burn,  
Imperishable son?

(T.D., p.15)

The poem ends with the poet "descending" and longing for death, or if not death to return to oblivious innocence:

I slip into a snow bed with no hurt  
Where warm will warm be warm enough to part  
Us. As I sink, I weep.

(T.D., p.15)

But these final lines could also be seen as what happened at birth, his "fall" from the fetal sack. Many years after Berryman had written this poem, he was asked about "the epistemology of loss" in "The Ball Poem" and the "irreversible loss" in The Dream Songs:

Yes, well, I don't like to generalize, but isn't it true that the three of us sitting here began with a great loss, from the controlled environment of the womb? After my son was born, I wrote a little poem / "A Sympathy, a Welcome," 1958/ that started: "Feel for your bad fall how could I fail, / poor Paul, who had it so good." I have many objections to Freud's findings but he was right about the importance of the womb. 1

Despite the poet's natural desire to return to the womb, we see that he has made some progress by the end of Section One. The winter landscape is not entirely frozen, he himself "sinks" and "weeps" but the "motions of walking trouble the winter air."

The poet, having set out in fear and need, truly begins his travel in Section Two. The opening lines of the first poem "The Spinning Heart" suggest, in Keats's phrase, that the poet is still "straining at particles of light in the midst of a great darkness",<sup>2</sup> but here the point is that there are particles of light at all:

The fireflies and the stars our only light,  
We rock, watching between the roses night  
If we could see the roses. We cannot.  
Where do the fireflies go by day, what eat?  
What categories shall we use tonight?

(T.D., p.19)

The day is "an exasperating day"; in the daylight men are "dishevelled and sad/Before their mirrors trying to be proud"; "the sweetness of the night/Will hide our imperfections" (T.D., p.19). The poet still longs to freeze "untidiness" into place, to halt the violence all about:

Crescent the pressures on the singular act  
Freeze it at last into its season, place,  
Until the flood and disorder of Spring.

(T.D., p.19)

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1. Heyen, "John Berryman: A Memoir and an Interview," p.60.
  2. Forman, ed. Letters, p.317.

Set against this bleak vision is another poem of incomplete empathy; the poet observes others trying to empathize with someone else's life. People are travelling "On the London Train" and "a dozen daze/Daily their eyes" (T.D., p.21) as they look at a man and think what he must be like and what he has experienced. But their "Destiny" is a "brazen luck" as he says several poems later; they are set

... in extremity  
To love and twig a nest.  
The frown on the great face  
Is recompence too little for  
Who suffer on the shore.

(T.D., p.22)

The "great face" might "frown" but as the poet will discover, "to love and twig a nest" is the most (in fact it is enough) he can hope for. Meanwhile, as a poet his work is with words: "words here are/At work upon salvation" (T.D., p.23).

It becomes apparent that the themes of Section One begin to resonate in Section Two, and so they will continue to resonate throughout The Dispossessed. The figure of the traveller and the tension of dark and light imagery sustain the movement of the entire volume; the titles alone serve as an index: "Parting as a Descent," "Cloud and Flame," "Travelling South," "Desire is a World by Night," "Farewell to Miles," "Canto Amor," "The Lightning," "Rock Study with a Wanderer," "The Long Home," "A Winter-Piece to a Friend Away," "New Year's Eve," "The Dispossessed." But an index is perhaps not enough to indicate the full resonance of expressions and uses of the night and winter. As we have seen, night is a time of desire and violence, of "biting and breeding" (T.D., p.20) and of consuming oblivion, but it is also a time of contemplation and purgation:

Last night for the first time I saw the Lights,  
The folding of the Lights like upright cloud  
Swinging as, in a childhood summer...

....

Questions went by,  
Swung in the dark back and were gone again.

(T.D., p.39)

In the suburb of the spirit I shall seize  
 The steady and exalted light of the sun,  
 And live there, out of the tension that decays,  
 Until I become a man alone at noon.

(T.D., p.44, p.46)

When we come to the concluding sections of The Dispossessed, the poet seems to have found through love a way out of the darkness and cold:

descend (my soul) out of the dismantling storm  
 into the darkness where the world is made.  
 .. Come back to the bright air. Love is multiform.

(T.D., p.72)

Obstinate, gleams from the black world gay and fair,  
 My love loves chocolate, she loves also me,  
 And the lightning dances, but I cannot despair.

(T.D., p.84)

Draw draw the curtain on a little life  
 A filth a fairing /summer/ Wood is darkening  
 Where bird call hovered now I hear no thing  
 I hours since came from my love my wife

Although a strange voice sometimes patiently  
 Near in the air when I lie vague and weak  
 As if I had a body tries to speak...  
 I must go back, she will be missing me

(T.D., p.89)

"Each succeeding book," Robert Lowell has said of Berryman's development, was "part of a single drive against the barriers of the commonplace."<sup>1</sup> Lowell is right to point out that in Berryman's early poetry "his proper bent seemed toward an intense and unwordly symbolic poetry."<sup>2</sup> But when we look closely at his use of the stock "symbols" of winter and night, it may also be said that his repeated use of "symbols" in different contexts and different experiences, both universal and individual, creates an empathic rhythm of imagery. Berryman's "symbols" are not the grand system of Yeats's but closer to the dynamic imagery of Dylan Thomas or Keats. And, too, Berryman's drive was not only "a single drive against the

1. Lowell, "The Poetry of John Berryman," p.3.

2. Ibid.

barriers of the commonplace," his drive was to become part of the commonplace, thus his inclination towards the dynamic image rather than the static symbol. His view of a dark world, as in "The Northern Wind is moaning outside" (T.D., p.42), becomes charged with the simplicity of an individual experience; the poet leaves the darkwood and says simply that he must return to his wife, "I must go back, she will be missing me" (T.D., p.89). One of Berryman's student poems, which was published in 1935, seems to have set his course:

There is no peace  
 Outside the song.  
So wrote the poet: While the drums  
Beat without;  
Remotely to his ears, years  
Rolled their long thunder. 1

Throughout my discussion of The Dispossessed I have referred to the speaker of many poems as "the poet." There is no distinct personality in The Dispossessed as in The Dream Songs, but there is a distinctive, though complex, voice which seems like one voice, a voice that jumps from "bric bristles" to direct simplicity, a voice of despair and of hope, of sadness and joy. And there are poems which attempt to give a particular voice, where the poet "becomes" another person as in the "Nervous Songs." Some of his voices seem more believable than others; "The Song of the Young Hawaiian" sounds somewhat facile to me, but "A Professor's Song" speaks naturally even though the voice is at odds with mock-heroic couplets:

Alive now -- no -- Blake would have written prose,  
 But movement following movement crisply flows,  
 So much the better, better the much so,  
 As burbleth Mozart. Twelve. The class can go.  
 Until I meet you, then, in Upper Hell  
 Convulsed, foaming immortal blood: farewell.

(T.D., p.77)

and "The Song of the Tortured Girl" (during the French Resistance) has a

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1. John Berryman, "Ivory," The Columbia Review, XVI (April 1935), p.18.

quiet terror of its own:

Through leafless branches the sweet wind blows  
 Making a mild sound, softer than a moan;  
 High in a pass once where we put our tent,  
 Minutes I lay awake to hear my joy.  
 -- I no longer remember what they want.--  
 Minutes I lay awake to hear my joy.

(T.D., p.79)

But the dominant voice in The Dispossessed is sophisticated, nostalgic, somber, and anonymous; as one reviewer observed, "something wistful and nostalgic is hiding behind a very sophisticated mask...."<sup>1</sup> Too much can be made of this "impersonality of the poet." Berryman observed in 1948 of Eliot's "impersonal" poetry: "perhaps in the end this poetry which the commentators are so eager to prove impersonal will prove to be personal, and will also appear then more terrible and more pitiful even than it does now."<sup>2</sup> We of course did not have to wait till after Berryman's death, as we did in Eliot's case, to know how true that judgement is. The echoes of Berryman's father's suicide ring sadly and clearly in "Father I fought for Mother, sleep where you sleep," or again in a "Letter to His Brother" (perhaps Berryman's younger brother Jefferson), when "the poet" says, "you know as well as I whose tooth/Sunk in our heels" (T.D., p.28), or still again, "Childhood speaks to me in an austere face" (T.D., p.37). And one finds more direct personal references: The poem "Ancestor," J.M. Linebarger observes, "honors Berryman's great-grandfather"<sup>3</sup>; and in "Boston Common" we learn that "Shaver" is the ancestor's name.<sup>4</sup> In "A Point of Age," the phrase "a trick a mockery my name" would seem to allude to Berryman's own name being changed from Smith to Berryman after his mother remarried. Thereafter Berryman seemed unsettled with his name; his name appears variously in the poetry he published at Columbia:

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1. Ferril, "Some Recent Poetry," p.19.
  2. Berryman, "A Peine na Piste," p.829.
  3. Linebarger, John Berryman, p.30.
  4. Ibid.

"John A. McA. Berryman," "John A.M. Berryman," (and once, in what would seem to be a misprint: John M.A. Berryman), "John McAlpin Berryman," and finally he settled on "John Berryman." (In one of his student poems he rightly said, "I stumble strangely over my name...."<sup>1</sup>) And finally, personal relationships are the subject of several poems (Bhain Campbell, a friend who died of cancer in 1940, and the two poems dedicated to his wife).

For all of these personal references there is still little sense of the personality of John Berryman himself in The Dispossessed as there would be in The Dream Songs and Love & Fame. (Of course Berryman was already writing personal poetry in his Sonnets, but these were not published until 1967.) The Dispossessed seems more "a common garden in a private ground" (T.D., p.67) than a private ground in a common garden. Though "the life we all lead" in The Dispossessed is fixed in a particular time, there is an overshadowing sense of a timeless coming and going of characters who do not know their destination. Even in Berryman's enclosed, somewhat formal lyrics there is always a sense of no man's being able to make out "what he's moving toward" (T.D., p.33). Berryman was, as he said later, always a follower of Pascal: "... I don't know what the issue is, or how it is to be resolved -- the issue of our common human life, yours, mine, your lady's, everybody's...."<sup>2</sup> Or, as he says in The Dispossessed, "What is your lot, your wife's, under the Lord?" (T.D., p.60). The individual's destiny in The Dispossessed is a matter of luck,

Whatever bargain can be got  
From the violent world our fathers bought,  
For which we pay with fantasy at dawn,  
Dismay at noon, fatigue, horror by night.

(T.D., pp.28-29)

In such a world where "no god calls down" (T.D., p.83), it would seem that the best one can do is to examine "Odysseys" (T.D., p.8) and study "Merely

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1. Berryman, "Ars Poetica," p.18.
  2. Kostelanetz, "Conversation with Berryman," p.345.

maps" (T.D., p.13) with the hope of finding the way. The animal world follows the sureness of instinct. When his poet friend Rhain Campbell dies, the poet speaker envies the birds who follow "their profession/of flight.../Certain of their nature and station of their mission" (T.D., p.62). But man's history is a series of "accidents" (T.D., p.65). To follow "maps" and examine "Odysseys" would seem to be of little use; in such a climate truly the best one can do is to hope for salvation "in the works of love" and then "Luck sometimes visits" (T.D., p.98); "Love, or its image in work" will bring us "the brazen luck to sleep with dark/And so to get responsible delight" (T.D., p.29).

"Responsible delight" and "brazen luck," like art and life, are not merely complementary but integral pursuits. One way in which we can approach our common fate, Berryman said, is "by means of art"<sup>1</sup>; or as Henry would say, "[Art is] one odd way to paradise" (The D.S. VI, 261). Berryman's words are always at work upon salvation (T.D., p.23), and his poetry increasingly became a Whitmanesque "Barefoot soul fringed with rime" (T.D., p.44). He would see himself as being like Swift who

Eight hours a day against his age  
 Began to document his rage  
 Towards the decades of strife and shift.

(T.D., p.27)

But the difficulty of writing poetry of experience is that though experience and the senses are the basis of thought, "Images are the mind's life" (T.D., p.8), the question remains, "How to arrange it" (T.D., p.8)? The means by which the poet may train his "animals" is the same for any person who translates experience into words: instinct and mind. All of us are in a sense "animal trainers" who live with our personal images of experience and from which the mind takes its life, a notion that

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1. Kostelanetz, "Conversation with Berryman," p.345.

Yeats finally accepted as the basis for his poetry in his poem "The Circus Animals' Desertion." Berryman's own version of "The Circus Animals' Desertion" (again, a poem which Berryman intends us to have in mind -- he was not writing a feeble imitation) is "The Animal Trainer"; Berryman begins where Yeats left off, in "the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart." The very titles point to the same field of reference, but each suggests an important and different emphasis: Yeats's title emphasizes the "animals," the symbols themselves; Berryman's the "animal trainer," the poet himself.

Berryman's "The Animal Trainer" is actually two poems with the same title, "The Animal Trainer (1)" and "The Animal Trainer (2)," and each suggests two aspects of the poet's living with images and symbols. Each poem is the same word for word till the fourth stanza where different views of the "animal trainer's" relation to his animals begin to develop. The form of both poems is identical: each begins with an eight-line stanza; the second stanza is seven lines; the third stanza six lines, and so on until the last stanza dwindles to one line. The effect of this telescoping form is to bring the weight of each stanza down upon each final line: (1) "-- You learn from animals. You learn in the dark"; (2) "-- Animals are your destruction, and your will." In both poems the "animal trainer" poet and his relation to his "animals" is the central concern. The first concludes that the poet will "learn from animals," the second that "animals" are his "destruction" but they also respond to his will. These are not mutually exclusive views of the poet's relation to his images, but rather two aspects of the poet's life and his art: art may teach him (or reform him); art may destroy him but it destroys in order to create. The poet does not say that "animals" are his will and his destruction; he ends with more assurance: "animals" destroy but they may also be controlled by his will. Harold Bloom has said of Yeats's "The Circus Animals' Desertion" that "to be satisfied with one's heart as poetic theme is to acknowledge what

it pained Yeats to recognize, that his concern was not with the content of poetic vision, as Blake's was, but with the relation of the poet to his vision, as Wordsworth's was, and Shelley's and Keats's also."<sup>1</sup>

Such a distress over the grand poetic vision did not concern Berryman as much as it did Yeats; his anxiety in "The Animal Trainer" was what the images would say of the heart, and further, what the images would do to the heart. In "The Circus Animals' Desertion," as Bloom says, Yeats did not seem entirely happy with the idea that he was forced into what was for him a new poetic; "he has not chosen 'the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart'."<sup>2</sup> Berryman was not happy to begin with the heart either, but in "The Animal Trainer" he seems more willing to begin in the darkness of "the suburb of the spirit"; a place where mind and body besiege us all. The mind seems to have much to offer:

...I shall seize  
The steady and exalted light of the sun  
And live there, out of the tension that decays,  
Until I become a man alone at noon.

(T.D., p.44, p.46)

This is a different way of saying what he said more obscurely in his early student poem "Lead Out the Weary Dancers": "...suffer me to see/The symbol I shall know." But unlike "Lead Out the Weary Dancers" the heart in both poems of "The Animal Trainer" has its say:

Heart said: Can you do without these animals?  
The looking, licking, smelling animals?  
The friendly fumbling beast?

(T.D., p.44, p.46)

The mind creates a "tension that decays"; "the hateful siege of contraries" between mind and body, while not resolvable, is the true and enduring tension of the life we all lead. The poet has another important concern in his relation to his "animals," that of responsibility. The poet has an "immense responsibility" (T.D., p.44) both to himself and to the reader

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1. Bloom, *Yeats*, p. 57.

2. *Ibid.*, p.459.

in controlling the flux of images, and thus the flux of experience. The poet, it seems, bears the greater part of the consequences of this responsibility, for through him and in him the "animals" are given life and continue to live. Whether they live for the reader depends not only upon the poet's ability to live with and enact the paradox of giving the "animals" life and making them be still but also upon the reader's ability to participate. The poet's symbols and images may not come alive for every reader, but this is not to deny that the "animals" actually do live in our experience. Like Pirandello's idea that drama lives within each of us, symbols and images live and die within us; they live their lives in the life we all lead:

'The circus is, it is our mystery,  
It is a world of dark where animals die.'

(T.D., p.47)

Living symbols and living images may be called poetic principles, principles Berryman constantly strove towards, but they may also be experienced as images and realities with which we live, whether or not we choose to recognize that they live within us. We may learn something of ourselves, Berryman implies, if we live with and attempt to tame the images of our experience; art and life are not the disparate activities we often make them out to be -- art is life, life is art, and in each, one must give and sympathize and control.

## II. The Complex Rhythms of The Dream Songs

Berryman completed The Dream Songs twenty years after The Dispossessed. During this time he had also written his critical biography on Stephen Crane, contributed substantially to an introductory textbook on literature called The Arts of Reading, completed his other long poem Homage to Mistress Bradstreet, and had written a number of reviews and a few essays. In Homage, and for that matter in his work on Stephen

Crane, Berryman was equally concerned with the artist's and the reader's relation to art, how and why the artist "makes" his work and what it does for and to him and the reader. We find in Homage some of the method and manner, and most of the themes of Berryman's earlier poetry. The dramatic energy of contraries which Keats felt as displayed in a fight in the streets is no less the dramatic energy of Homage, as Berryman said:

... the poem laid itself out in a series of rebellions. I had her [Anne Bradstreet] rebel first against the new environment [of colonial America] and above all against her barrenness (which in fact lasted for years), then against her marriage (which in fact seems to have been brilliantly happy), and finally against her continuing life of illness, loss, and age. 1

Berryman's concern over individual worth, and a distinct personality, and his sense of narrative, which the arrangement of the poems in The Dispossessed suggests, are given full expression in Homage. When Berryman realized he was writing a long poem on Anne Bradstreet, he said that one of his first thoughts was "Narrative! let's have narrative, and at least one dominant personality, and no fragmentation! -- in short, let us have something spectacularly NOT The Waste Land...."<sup>2</sup> Allied with his concern over a dominant personality in the poem was also the personality of the poet, "the 'I' of the twentieth century poet, which modulates into her [Anne Bradstreet's] voice, who speaks most of the poem";<sup>3</sup> the poet "works from himself into her through the two of them, back into her, out of her, to the end of the poem which ends in the twentieth century."<sup>4</sup> Little wonder that Robert Lowell would say of Homage that it is "the most resourceful historical poem in our literature."<sup>5</sup> And the rhythms give the poem its sense of life as well; as Lowell has observed:

1. Berryman, "One Answer to a Question," p.73.
2. Ibid., p.72.
3. Ibid., p.73.
4. Kostelnetz, "Conversation with Berryman," p.345.
5. Lowell, "The Poetry of John Berryman," p.3.

Here [in Homage] Berryman's experiments with music and sentence structure find themselves harnessed to a subject and trial that strain them to the limit. His lovely discordant rhythms ride through every break, splutter, archaism and inversion. The old rustic seventeenth-century, provincial simplicity survives and is greatly enriched by the jagged intellectual probing and techniques of the modern poet. 1

Homage, with its unique and dramatic blending of two personalities and its complex rhythms, has a sense of incompleteness which The Dispossessed and The Dream Songs have; the poem constitutes the act of becoming, in the poet, Anne Bradstreet, and the reader; instead of describing the encounter or simply relying upon dialogue, the poem is a passing realization. In Homage Berryman continues to insist that reason, planning, and purpose may be less effective guides than a trust in instinct and an acceptance of luck. In a real sense he is still a traveller, not a static observer, and his object is to unite individuals of the past and present for the duration of the poem, the American "pioneer heroine, a sort of mother to artists and intellectuals who would follow her and play a large role in the development of the nation,"<sup>2</sup> and the modern American poet who carries on that development, at least in poetry. But in this union there is no total resolution; the poem thrives on rebellion, and, Berryman said, "even in the moment of the poem's supreme triumph -- the presentment... of the birth of her first child -- rebellion survives."<sup>3</sup> In Browning's phrase in his preface to Stratford, Berryman was "not interested in character in action but action in character." The action in character which Berryman continued to see as the worthiest and noblest is <sup>the</sup> individual's survival with dignity, compassion, and love through "every possible trial and possibility of error." This is not to say that resolution and happiness will ever be found. Berryman continued to believe that the

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1. Ibid.

2. Stitt, "The Art of Poetry: An Interview with John Berryman," p.195.

3. Berryman, "One Answer to a Question," p.74.

"serious writer is something of an inquisitor":

He even asks questions. Indeed this is one of his major purposes, as it is also one of the purposes of poets and dramatists. He does not so much, however, ask questions of the reader as he forces the reader to put to himself the same questions about life that the author has had to put to himself. 1

So we begin with this view that the author is "an inquisitor" when we come to The Dream Songs. The great questions of living, loving, and dying have no answers, but pursuing them, as Henry does so feverishly, does elicit some gain. After he had completed Homage, Berryman said that he "wanted to do something as different as possible"; he wanted "a completely modern poem, Bradstreet having been an essentially seventeenth-century poem with twentieth-century interpolations."<sup>2</sup> The Dream Songs has only some of the sense of fine polish and tautness of Homage; it has little sense of a chronological narrative, though a narrative may be worked out as we shall see. The mind, the heart, instinct and the blind luck of fate are nearly impossible to cope with, but the individual may succeed in gaining some measure of awareness so that he can succeed on an individual basis -- the only success Henry finds worthwhile. Berryman said that The Dream Songs is not a work of "wisdom literature" which he defined as "a term applied to certain books of the Old Testament... which aim at an explanation of how human life should be conducted."<sup>3</sup> The Dream Songs aims at how a modern "human American man" (I, 13)<sup>4</sup> lives, his trials and failures, joys and triumphs. It is supremely a poem of experience and perhaps owes something to William Carlos Williams, but definitely owes much to Wordsworth, Whitman, and Pound. What Randall Jarrell observed of Williams' poetry applies in full measure to The Dream Songs as well as The Prelude, "Song of Myself," and the Cantos (and we should recall Keats's notion of "Negative Capability"):

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1. Berryman, The Arts of Reading, p.207.
  2. Kostelanetz, "Conversation with Berryman," p.346.
  3. Berryman, The Arts of Reading, p.225.
  4. Throughout these chapters on The Dream Songs, I shall cite references to the Songs only by part and song number.

Williams' ability [is] to rest (or at least thrash happily about) in contradictions, doubts, and general guess work, without ever climbing aboard any of the monumental certainties that go perpetually by, perpetually on time -- this ability may seem the opposite of Whitman's gift for boarding every certainty and riding off into every infinite, but the spirit behind them is the same. 1

Where to begin and how to approach this difficult poem of nearly seven thousand lines? We must begin first with the paradoxical view that The Dream Songs is an incomplete but whole poem. It is neither a collection of lyrics nor simply a set of stylistic exercises or a cinematic experiment of abrupt cutting between one style (or image or sequence of events) and another. Berryman insisted that "editors and critics for years have been characterizing them [the Songs] as poems but I don't quite see them as that; I see them as parts, admittedly more independent than parts usually are."<sup>2</sup> The sense of completeness in The Dream Songs is in part achieved by the unifying consciousness (or unconsciousness) of one personality set in an eleven year period, and each individual Song, composed in the same form throughout, gives a sense of tidiness. But in the sense of the life we all lead or of the whole life, it is an extremely untidy work, and all of the questions and enigmas persist even after the final line. While most of the action and self-revelation are significant enough to give the work focus, there are some dull parts. The poem of experience must depend upon "clumsy life," to recall Henry James's phrase, and out of this the long poem would be, like Pound's *Cantos*, as Berryman said, "for long stretches..., canto after canto..., unintelligible and boring."<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, as Lawrence once said in insisting on a looseness and formlessness in the novel, "a great deal of the meaning of life and of art lies in the apparently dull spaces, the pauses, the unimportant passages."<sup>4</sup>

1. Randall Jarrell, The Third Book of Criticism (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1965), p.31..
2. Berryman, "One Answer to a Question," p.75.
3. Sisson, "My Whiskers Fly: An Interview with John Berryman," p.16.
4. D.H. Lawrence, Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D.H. Lawrence, ed. Edward D. McDonald (London: Heinemann, 1936), p.248.

Whatever important or unimportant passages there are in The Dream Songs, it is apparent that fairly early on Berryman had some idea as to how the poem would end. Larry Vonalt has shrewdly pointed out that when Berryman published "My daughter's heavier," which was to be the final Dream Song 385, in the Times Literary Supplement on November 25, 1965, the title was "The Last Dream Song: 161." Vonalt soundly speculates that Berryman was in effect announcing "which of the Dream Songs would stand last."<sup>1</sup> But there is another, later source of authority as to the ending of The Dream Songs. In an interview about a year before Berryman died, he said that he had planned a new edition of The Dream Songs, but, he said, not only would the "heavy daughter" Song stand last but also the penultimate poem (384) and Song 382 would remain where they were: "The dancer song and Henry's visit to his father's grave and the song about his daughter, that's the end."<sup>2</sup> I have discussed the dancer poem and will return to it and I will also discuss the poem where Henry visits his father's grave, but at present let us consider the last Dream Song to see where Henry's "incomplete" journey ends.

A phrase in Henry's Song in which he laments the death of William Carlos Williams suggests an approach not only <sup>to</sup> the last Dream Song but also to the whole of The Dream Songs. He says that Williams, in both the sense of being a doctor and a poet, "delivered infinite babies in one great birth" (VII, 324). The Dream Songs is indeed one great birth of 385 enigmatic babies, all crying with a Joycean expectation and demanding persistent care and feeding. The last Dream Song is a healthy baby, red-faced, wide-eyed, and teeming with new life. The reader is asked, as he is asked in each of the Songs, to be nothing less than a midwife who

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1. Larry Vonalt, "Dream Songs First and Last," John Berryman Studies, I (Fall, 1975), 30.
  2. Berg, "An Interview with John Berryman," p.10.

practices couvade as well. When Henry says, "These Songs are not meant to be understood, you understand (VII, 366), I hear an emphasis on "you" which makes the statement mean "you" alone may understand, Henry cannot do it for "you." Henry also says that his Songs are meant to "terrify & comfort"; this last Song gives both Henry and the reader as much comfort as they may expect in an inscrutable world; it properly follows the terrifying penultimate Song in which Henry finally lays to rest his father's awful ghost:

My daughter's heavier. Light leaves are flying.  
 Everywhere in enormous numbers turkeys will be dying  
 and other birds, all their wings.  
 They never greatly flew. Did they wish to?  
 I should know. Off away somewhere once I knew  
 such things.

Or good Ralph Hodgson back then did, or does.  
 The man is dead whom Eliot praised. My praise  
 follows and flows too late.  
 Fall is grievous, brisk. Tears behind the eyes  
 almost fall. Fall comes to us as a prize  
 to rouse us toward our fate.

My house is made of wood and it's made well,  
 unlike us. My house is older than Henry;  
 that's fairly old.  
 If there were a middle ground between things and the soul  
 or if the sky resembled more the sea,  
 I wouldn't have to scold  
 my heavy daughter.

(VII, 385)

"My daughter's heavier," a short statement of fact lingered over in consonantal r's. But who is this daughter? Why is she "heavier"? "Heavier" than what or who? In order to answer these questions, as we must do for the questions nearly every line raises, we must look at the shadowy folds of the preceding Songs so that Henry's "muffled purpose" is turned into a "Tolstoyan clarity" (VII, 370). An early reference to Henry's daughter is puzzling; Henry is "on a twine hung from disastered trees" and "swinging his daughter" (III, 72), a terrible version of "rock-a-bye baby in the tree top." No less puzzling is Henry's "squeezing his

old heart with a daughter loose" (V, 97). The first clue to what Henry means by his daughter is his wife's pregnancy (V, 109). But how does he know that his wife will give birth to a daughter? Does he already have a daughter? When Henry mentions his wife's pregnancy, he vaguely suggests that his own birth might take place: "Henry has (perhaps) many months to go/until another Spring" (V,109). We have now the possibility of two births, his own "birth" and his unborn child's. But a third kind of birth is suggested very shortly after this Song when Henry refers to his Songs as "growing daughters" (V, 131). From this reference till the last Song, all three possibilities of birth develop simultaneously.

Henry happily anticipates his wife's giving birth and somehow knows that the baby will be a girl. The intense love he promises the baby is expressed in violent image, similar to that of Romeo and Juliet's passionate pledges:

Wait till that kid  
comes out, I'll fix her.  
I'll burp her till she bleeds, I'll take an axe  
to her inability to focus, until in  
one weird moment I fall in love with her too.

(VI, 271)

Just as Romeo and Juliet's violent imagery betrays their understanding of a mature love (and, unlike Henry, foretells their doom), so Henry betrays his understanding of mature love. The daughter, Twiss, is born and Henry is a proud father who anticipates the best for his "sturdy" and "beautiful" daughter:

O the baby has had one million & thirteen falls,  
no wonder she howls  
She'll trip on the steps at Vassar, ho, & bawl  
in Latin.

(VII, 293)

When Henry appears on television with his baby daughter, that same fatherly pride swells up:

The baby on a million screens, hurrah,  
 my almost perfect child, in the midst of cameramen  
 & Daddy's high-lit reading.  
 She never made a peep to that sensitive mike  
 my born performer. We'll see her through Smith & then  
 swiftly into the Senate.

(VII, 298)

"Twiss is a tidy bundle" and gives Henry "acres of joy" (VII, 330). By the end of the Songs Henry's love for his daughter seems to have matured; his daughter is "heavy," suggesting a love that has ripened to a fullness. Henry's other "daughters" have developed as well. His Song-daughters are not such "a tidy bundle"; they give him as much pain as joy:

My baby chatters, I feel the end is near  
 & strong of my large work, which will appear,  
 and baffle everybody.

(VII, 308)

Clearly, Henry is coming to regard all of his "daughters" as one baby, but each one is still a separate birth in preparation for one great birth. One might conjecture that his giving birth to his daughter-Dream Songs should yield no less a "ripeness" than the developing mature love for his real daughter; The Dream Songs indeed is a means of coming to life:

Leaving the ends aft open, touch the means,  
 whereby we ripen. Touch by all means the means  
 whereby we come to life....

(VII, 305)

He realizes that he is giving birth to enigmatic daughters and wants to "bring those babies into camp" (VII, 333). He agonizes that he will not bring them round; perhaps, he seems to feel, if he could write an essay to be called "The Care & Feeding of Long Poems" (VII, 354), he would be more objective about completing his great work and rationalize the whole into being. But he cannot; his poems are still separate daughters, and he still strives to "fulfil a pledge/he gave himself to end a labour":

Strange & new outlines  
 blur the old project. Soon they discover  
 the pen & the heart, the old heart with its fears  
 & the daughter for which it pines.

(VII, 379)

We recall that an anguished Henry was "squeezing his old heart with a daughter on the loose" (V, 97); now his wise "old heart" is not so insistent -- he "pines" for his daughter. Near the end of The Dream Songs Henry is "at the end of the labour"; his baby, yet unborn, is "all hunched up, in sleep" (VII, 383). In the final Song he is still near giving birth to The Dream Songs; the contractions begin with "my daughter's heavier" but by the end of the Song the daughter is still "heavy"; Henry has not given birth. Throughout Henry has referred to each Song as a daughter as well as the whole as one daughter; now The Dream Songs is one daughter; this daughter, yet unborn, is almost a fulfillment of Henry's promise in the first song to "bear & be."

The word "heavier" (and "heavy") reminds us of one of Henry's earliest and most important Dream Songs: "There sat down, once, a thing on Henry's heart/so heavy..." (II, 20). Henry's wrenching losses (his security of the fetal sack, his father, his mother, his friends, the Fall, his wives, his dignity), which were so heavy that it seemed they would crush him, Henry now understands and accepts. The heaviness of his burden has become a secular version of felix culpa; his losses are the "prize" that will "rouse" him towards his own rebirth. Like John Keats who said near the end of his life that he felt he was suspended in a "posthumous existence," Henry has lived "posthumously" (compare Part IV, "Opus Posthumous"). If he himself is to be reborn, then he seems to feel that he may be reborn by actually giving birth himself, not simply "couvade" (V, 124) where the father does not actually bear a child. Often he is sure that he will be giving life to another being, this "bulky bole-proud blue-green moist/thing" (III, 75):

A massive, unpremeditated, instantaneous  
transfer of solicitude from the thing to the creature  
Henry sometimes felt.

A state of chancy mind when facts stick out  
frequent was his, while that this shrugging girl,  
keen, do not quit, he knelt.

(V, 115)

He finally describes himself as "gravid" (VI, 261) (i.e. pregnant). But the daughter remains unborn; the umbilical cord is not severed but will remain attached to Henry who gave his daughter life and who will continue to sustain her. This concept is not as difficult to imagine as it may seem; in effect Berryman is saying what the Romantics said of their poems, that they were organic. The poem, according to the Romantics, begins as "seed" and it "grows" in the imagination and experience of the poet (unconsciously, as in dreams) and fuses diverse materials and experiences, "the hateful seige of contraries." The complete poem is in effect a living thing which continues to take its very life from the diversity in which it germinated. If the poem were ripped out of the soil which gave it life then in a sense the life of the poem withers. In other words, Berryman believed, as the Romantics did, that the poem is not an object based purely on "design" but that it grows out of the living experience of the poet whose experience continues to sustain the poem as long as it exists. Berryman has varied this organic concept by making his poem another living person. Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Shelley felt they could commune with a living spirit in outer nature; Keats, on the other hand, knew he was projecting his own moods into nature, the nightingale is personified as the poet feels. Similarly Berryman seeks his poetic analogy in some living Other, but in <sup>a</sup> human rather than <sup>in</sup> vegetation, birds, or animals. His poems are a daughter, not a flower or a bird. Nature to Berryman is a backdrop to the human condition; Henry says, "next time it will be nature & Thoreau" (VI, 265), but there never was a next time. Even in Love & Fame he says, "For 'children' read: big fat fresh original & characteristic poems" (L. & F., p.25). To most modern poets nature does not stand in reciprocity to the poet's experience (compare Shelley's "Skylark" and Hardy's "Shelley's

Skylark"); Romantic nature, in Lawrence's phrase "birds, beasts, and flowers," may inspire a poem but it too dies. Berryman's "daughters" will die too, but he gives more of a sense of the ongoing human life. Though "a little boy/is what is Daddy's mike/that which he seeks & fears" (VII, 330), evidently, Henry need not "fear" a little girl; she is not merely a "mike" but a living being who will in turn "bear" new life.

The rest of the first line of the first stanza shifts from an emphasis of The Dream Songs as a daughter to another traditionally organic metaphor of "leaves" of a tree; "Light leaves are flying." The rhythm and emphasis of "light leaves are flying" is trippingly punctuated with consonantal l's at every stress and suggests the movement the lines express. While it might be that the "leaves" of a tree recall the first Song where Henry remembers being in a sycamore tree, it seems to me that the leaves, particularly in juxtaposition to the preceding "organic" metaphor of Henry's heavy daughter, mean the leaves of The Dream Songs, like Whitman's view of his Leaves of Grass. Henry has referred to his Songs<sup>95</sup> as "leaves" as well as "daughters"; his Songs are gathered together and, he says, "I rake/my leaves and cop my promise" (II, 40), and as he struggles to write a few Song-leaves he says that "leaves fell, but only a few" (III, 75). Like Henry's "daughters," his "burning leaves" help him to stir love and to come to terms with loss:

The leaves fall, lives fall, every little while  
you can count with stirring love on a new loss  
& an emptier place.  
The style is black jade at all seasons, the style  
is burning leaves....

(VI, 191)

"Leaves" aid Henry but they do not solve everything; predictably, other writers' "Leaves" are limited as well -- "Leaves on leaves on leaves of books I've turned/and I know nothing" (VII, 370). In this last Song Henry's "leaves are flying," scattered to the winds (compare Henry's Berryman's)

prefatory Song to Berryman's Sonnets: "free them [the sonnets] to the winds to play"); as he says in an earlier Song, "words light as feathers/fly" (V, 174). As an expression of a theory of art, the first line makes two different, but related, points: on the one hand Henry's daughter-Dream Song will never break out of its fetal sack; on the other hand, Henry's Song-leaves drop away from their tree. This contradiction compresses into one line the paradox of the artist's relationship with his art: the poem is inevitably organic and external to the poet. In turn, the poem may be organic to the reader to the extent that he participates in and gives himself over to it. Just as the Songs have been "fighting 'at random'" (VI, 177), so now the "light leaves are flying," and the reader will at first catch them at random and then slowly absorb them into the rhythms of his own experience. "Light" leaves suggest both illumination and humor and offsets the gravity of the preceding "heavy" daughter (there is also a suggestion of "heavy" in Black jive talk); together the two statements suggest the method of The Dream Songs and the extremes of the reality of the relationship between the Songs and the reader, and the writer and his art.

While the "light leaves are flying" of the first line looks back, it also looks forward to the next several lines, the fall season and American Thanksgiving:

Everywhere in enormous numbers turkeys will be dying  
and other birds, all their wings.

Henry had hoped that he might finish his long poem by Christmas or Thanksgiving:

Fallen leaves & litter. It is September.  
Henry's months now begin. Much to be done  
by merry Christmas  
much to be done by the American Thanksgiving....

(VII, 309)

So much has been done and The Dream Songs ends; it is time for the living to give thanks for a great harvest. Henry, the "human American man" (I, 13) who has been so concerned about his Americanness, his American friends, and

his American society, chooses an appropriate American holiday to end his "heavy" labor. All of Henry's Thanksgivings have not necessarily been happy national celebrations; when "the land is celebrating men of war," Henry says,

It's late for gratitude,  
an annual, rude  
roar of a moment's turkey's 'Thanks'.

(III, 61)

But, generally, Henry's Thanks givings have been a time for

summing up  
that which one bears more steadily than else  
and the odd definite good.

(VI, 163)

So the last Song is especially a "summing up" of what Henry "bears" (that ambiguous word again) and a giving thanks for the "odd definite good." But what does Henry mean by "other birds" dying too? The logical explanation is that other birds, like a duck or a hen, are killed for a Thanksgiving meal. But certainly Henry also means that the "brainfever birds" (I, 5) will be dying too. Only a few Songs before the last one, the birds have been "driven away" (VII, 378) from Henry's garden; now the birds will be killed in a feast of Thanksgiving.

In the fourth line of the first stanza, Henry adds that all of these birds "never greatly flew," and then asks the question, "Did they wish to?" Like the "flying leaves" of his poem and like Henry himself, these birds have accepted their own limitations. (In Henry's case, he has accepted the human limitations of what he can do and of what he can understand about himself, his problems, and the human condition.) Henry's resignation at the end of his long poem is similar to Dante's resignation at the end of his long poem; Dante, too, admitted that he could not soar to the final heights:

I yearned to know just how our image merges  
 into that circle [of the eternal], and how it there finds place;  
 but mine were not the wings of such a flight.

("The Paradise" XXXIII, 137-139)

"Leaves" and turkeys' "wings," in fact, do not ever fly greatly; answers to the merging of the temporal and the eternal are beyond any mortal understanding. Like Dante, Henry sees himself in a circle (Henry wishes to get out of "the whole humiliating Human round" [V, 121]), and he desires to know how his circling may merge with the circle of the eternal; but the best both Dante and Berryman can do is to recognize the circle of their being and hope for a merging with the eternal. While they live the only flying they do is given in love: "Love has wings & flies" (VII, 359). In this respect Henry's "wings" are more like Wordsworth's. Near the end of The Prelude, he says that his "wings" allowed him to soar high enough to see the "vast prospect of the world which... [he] had been/And was," and, he says, he had centered the whole of his "Song" on love:

The termination of my course  
 Is nearer now, much nearer; yet even then,  
 In that distraction and intense desire,  
 I said unto the life which I had lived,  
 Where art thou? Hear I not a voice from thee  
 Which 'tis reproach to hear? Anon I rose  
 As if on wings, and saw beneath me stretched  
 Vast prospect of the world which I had been  
 And was; and hence this Song, which like a lark  
 I have protracted, in the unwearied heavens  
 Singing, and often with more plaintive voice  
 Attenuated to the sorrows of the earth,  
 Yet centring all on love, and in the end  
 All grateful, if rightly understood. 1

(XIII, 372-385)

The first stanza concludes with a qualified answer to the question, did the birds wish to fly greatly? "I should know. Off away somewhere once I knew/such things." How greatly Henry himself could fly was known "once" before the Fall, for Adam had in his possession at least the pattern

1. William Wordsworth, The Prelude: A Parallel Text, ed. J.C. Maxwell (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1971), p.532. I quote from the 1805-6 version.

of all knowledge. After man's "departure" (I, 1) from the Garden of Eden man lost his harmony, his unity with God (man is in "pieces" as Henry often says), and "thereafter nothing fell out as it might or ought" (I, 1). In the Garden, Henry would have been happy, but man is outside the Garden and longs to return. One way to return might be through poetry wherein art becomes a monastery; the pieces of man need not "heed their piecedom"; the pieces may "sit up" and write (VII, 211). The epigraph of Keats's letter to Shelley gives us the clue: "I am pickt up and sorted to a pip. My imagination is a monastery and I am its monk." Thus, art is "one odd way to Paradise" (VI, 261). Henry seems to agree with Blake, "Art is the Tree of Life" (though the Tree does not figure prominently in The Dream Songs, it would seem that Berryman owed something to Blake and Yeats, both of whom Berryman admired; in their poetry there were two Trees, the Tree of Life, Divine Energy, and Love and the Tree of Death, Chaos, and the Fall).<sup>1</sup> "Off away somewhere once," the very arrangement of the words seems to set each word apart so as to emphasize that Henry once knew of a perfect Tree of Life.

The second stanza begins oddly, "Or good Ralph Hodgson back then did, or does." Is Henry saying that Ralph Hodgson, a minor English poet who died in 1962 while The Dream Songs was being written, "once knew such things" that Henry does not know? I think not. Henry corrects himself as he shifts from the past tense to the present tense, "did, or does"; he is saying that Hodgson "does" know now that he is dead. Henry seems to be implying that Hodgson has returned to that perfect harmony and unity that man has lost. Henry's reference to Ralph Hodgson might seem misplaced, but if we remember that association is a ruling principle in dreams, then Hodgson might reasonably be an extension of the first stanza dream "structure." Hodgson wrote a number of poems about animals and birds; he felt, Berryman

1. See Kermode, Romantic Image, pp.92-103.

said elsewhere, "more for animal's maltreatment by man in his left little finger than all the rest of even his own race felt put together...."<sup>1</sup> One of Hodgson's most memorable poems called "The Bull," is about an old dying bull who is left for the birds to pick at the carrion. Before the bull dies he dreams of his past proud days, how when he was young he was "In the valley warm and green/Full of baby wonderment": he dreams how he grew strong and one day defeated the leader of the herd and "came to sultan power." But the bull's dreams are delusory; we "pity him that he must wake" from his splendid yesterday. The poem ends with the old bull turning:

to meet the loathly birds  
Flocking round him from the skies,  
Waiting for the flesh that dies.

I am not suggesting that Henry alludes to Hodgson's poem "The Bull," but the old bull's dreaming of a past happy life and his last encounter with the "loathly birds" bear many resemblances to Henry's struggles and longings.

But the first line about Ralph Hodgson, rather than vaguely referring back to the first stanza, leads more directly into the next line of this second stanza: "The man [Hodgson] is dead whom Eliot praised." Odd word "praised," because Eliot's poem about Hodgson is really light verse; his "Lines to Ralph Hodgson Esq." ends,

How delightful to meet Mr. Hodgson!  
    (Everyone wants to know him).  
He has 999 canaries  
And round his head finches and fairies  
In jubilant rapture skim.

If I were to press hard on Henry's allusion to Eliot's praise of Hodgson, it would seem that Hodgson had something in common with the birds which never greatly flew in the first stanza. But it seems to me that Henry's thinking of Hodgson's recent death and Eliot's past "praise" for him reminds Henry of his own more sober laments of poets who died during the eleven years of The Dream Songs. Once again, Henry's "praise follows and flows too late." So

1. John Berryman, ed. "Afterward," The Titan by Theodore Dreiser (New York: New American Library, 1965), p.506.

many fellow writers, the "clan," have died: Robert Frost, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, Randall Jarrell, Delmore Schwartz, Theodore Roethke, Sylvia Plath, William Carlos Williams, and Louis MacNeice. We recall again *Dream Song 29*, "All the bells say: too late"; Henry's praise always "follows and flows too late." The death of another poet sits down "heavily" on Henry's heart and he is reminded once again of his own mortality, at least it seems so because of the next line: "Fall is grievy, brisk." (Of course he refers to two "falls" here, the fall season and the Fall.) Fall as "grievy" (could there be a pun here? that is, "gravy"; Fall in a sense is gravy to Henry) suggests that Henry is still troubled, but "brisk" hints at something more invigorating and bracing. The next sentence, "Tears behind the eyes/almost fall," positively suggests that Henry is coming to terms with the Fall and the losses it entails. Finally, he states straightforwardly his complete acceptance of the Fall as something beneficial:

Fall comes to us as a prize  
to rouse us toward our fate.

This conclusion to the second stanza is another "summing up" of unity lost and unity regained. The Fall of man might be the cause of man's mortality, his fate, but Henry now accepts the Fall as a "prize"; he relies, as Milton did, upon the ancient view of the Fall as fortunate (*felix culpa*). Man's fall was fortunate because out of this evil comes a greater good; God's grace and magnanimity are demonstrated and realized. In an early Song, appropriately entitled "The Secret of Wisdom," Henry says that he has heard about this "grace":

We hear the more  
sin has increast, the more  
grace has been caused to abound.

(I, 20)

But Henry realizes that to recognize God's grace is neither to understand it nor to justify God's way of showing it: "God loves his creatures when he treats them so?" (VI, 266). Henry attempts to avoid thinking too much on

these questions, and at one point he goes so far as to say he "Likes Fall/Hé would be prepared to live in a world of Fäll/for ever, impenitent Henry" (III, 77). He would have run off to the sea, "but for his studies careful of the Fall" (V, 141). "The iron pear" of the Fall is "rammed into his mouth" to stay; it "swells up to four times ordinary size/slowly cracking his skull open" (V, 144). Once Henry is aware of man's original unity with God, he suffers under the terrible burden of the freedom to overcome his disunity. Henry gives up trying to understand or to justify the ways of God to himself and to man; his Songs become, rather, a "Wordsworthian theodicy of the private life."<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth's general theodicy, as would the Christian theodicy, makes limited attempts to locate the justification for human suffering in man's journey to lost Eden. But Wordsworth's (and Henry's) private theodicy "translates the painful process of Christian conversion and redemption into a painful process of self-transformation, crisis and self-recognition, which culminates in a stage of self-coherence, self-awareness, and assured power that is its own reward."<sup>2</sup> As for God, He may be as Henry says, "a slob/playful, vast, rough-hewn" (VI, 128). One may fasten hi<sup>m</sup>self to and take comfort in "the blessing/of the living God" (VI, 234); but, for Henry at least, art recounts and becomes a means of self-formation; the rest "lay in the Hands above" (VII, 279). The Fall has "roused" Henry towards a gradual, though not permanent, reintegration in art of all that has been divided: his mind and the outer world, his mind and body, his mind and heart, his past and present self, himself and God.

The opening lines of the third stanza make it clear that Henry's private theodicy is as dependent upon a secular art as Wordsworth's was:

My house is made of wood and it's made well,  
unlike us.

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1. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, pp.95-96.
  2. Ibid., p.96.

His house is neither a "well-made" ivory tower nor "well-made" Yeatsian tower (Henry has rejected Yeats's symbolism); Henry's house is simply "made well" and constructed from the practical, the every-day, and subject to decay. It is as though Henry has chopped down the forest which surrounded him and used the wood to build a house. "Made" is repeated twice, emphasizing the importance of the act of making; "made" suggests, too, the traditional middle Scots word for the poet, a "makar." (Henry has called himself a "makar" in *Dream Songs* 43 and 184.) "House" and "home" have been such an important part of providing Henry with a shelter of "many rooms" (VII, 319) for his turbulent life. As I have suggested, Henry's house is a house of art similar in texture to Henry James's "House of Fiction," but it is also a coffin (compare in the "Opus Posthumous" poems, "my wood or word seems to be rotting" [IV, 857]), a home for a family, a shelter for containing (though not resolving) contraries, and according to Freud, in dreams the house is often a representation of the human body. "Cave-man Henry" says to his wife, "It's cold in here. I'd rather have a house/a house would be better" (VII, 381). Henry's attitude towards his house has altered considerably: at first he is unconcerned about a house and he lives in "a pup-tent"; when he becomes a houseowner, his house (not a "home") simply represents "respectability" (VI, 163); but very soon Henry's house becomes more of a home -- his house is "firm" (VI, 277) and his "pride in his house was almost fierce" (VII, 357). Freud discovered that in dreams the house is "the only typical, ... regularly occurring, representation of the human form as a whole...."<sup>1</sup> Henry's dreams suggest this same representation: he speaks of his "roof" being "lefted off" (II, 39); one of Henry's surnames is "House" (I, 12, 17); he says that "we are using our own skins as wallpaper" (III, 53); and he refers to his mind and heart as "upstairs and downstairs" (18, 78, 175). All of the

1. Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis*, rev. ed., trans. by Joan Riviere (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1929), p.128.

meanings of "house" fold into this last reference to Henry's house of wood: his art, his family, his coffin, his mind and body, and all are "made well" in a concerted and conscious effort.

"My house is older than Henry," the second line ends; then follows a colloquial counterpoint and understatement in the next line, "that's fairly old." In these lines I hear Henry's voice modulating into the poet's voice, as Berryman said of the first Dream Song, "where the 'I' perhaps of the poet disappears into Henry's first and third persons...."<sup>1</sup> (Just as Anne Bradstreet's voice modulates into the poet's voice at the end of Homage to Mistress Bradstreet.) The same umbilical cord which connects Henry and Berryman connects them both to their "daughter." The various meanings of house carry forward in "my house is older than Henry," but now the emphasis is on oldness. The past, both Henry's and man's whole history, has been Henry's eyes, his "ancient fires" (III, 77); Henry describes himself as being "old as a hieroglyph" (VII, 362) and as being "900 years old" (VII, 365) -- that is fairly old. (If we assume that this Song was written in 1966, then it is logical that Henry is "900 years old" in that 1066, the Norman Conquest, is the beginning of modern English as a poetic language: Henry has said that he is a "monoglot of English/(American Version)" [II, 487].) There are "secrets" hidden in "history & theology, hidden in rhyme" (VI, 159) and Henry feels that the best the modern poet may do, perhaps taking his cue from T.S. Eliot, is to recover from the past that which has been lost and to write in "new forms in which ancient thought appears" (VII, 282). The poet's subject "was given of old" (V, 125); the poet ignores the poetry of the past at his own peril for there are "tests really tests/... set by the masters & graded" (V, 125). But most important in any private theodicy, the poet dares not forget that "the wind blows hard from our past into our future/and we are that wind...";

1. Berryman, "One Answer to a Question," p.75.

the difficulty is that "the wind's nature/was not to last" (VII, 282).

The last four lines conclude The Dream Songs just as enigmatically as it began:

If there were a middle ground between things and the soul  
 or if the sky resembled more the sea,  
 I wouldn't have to ~~sold~~  
 my heavy daughter.

"If" and "if" -- qualifiers to wish away the causes for turbulence. Again and again Henry has longed for some "middle ground" where life is not so difficult and where dilemmas are not known. Henry cannot find the middle ground he needs; sometimes there is no ground at all as he dangles "on the rungs, an open target" (VI, 199), or he lies in the "middle of the world" and "twitches" (III, 53), or he finds himself in a limbo "neither below or above" (VI, 256). Like Job, so much seems to crash down upon Henry, even the fame he longed for; the public demands become too much for the famous poet, and he wishes for "a middle zone/ where he could be & become both unknown & known" (VII, 287). Art, he hopes, will establish a firm middle ground but he begins to realize the limitations of art and that he himself remains stuck in the "middle" (and with middle-age) with no ground to stand on:

The shadows of grey ash on my page  
 I can't get out of this either to youth or age,  
 I'm stuck with middle.

(VII, 340)

Henry is stuck "in the middle, in short, of a war" (VII, 356) where his "fine body" and "very useful mind" (VII, 380) beset him. Henry's friend sums it up; man has no choice in the matter of establishing a middle ground:

We hafta die.  
 That is our 'pointed task. Love & die.  
 -Yes; that makes sense.  
 But what makes sense between, then? What if I  
 roiling & babbling & braining brook on why and  
 just sat on the fence?  
 -I doubts you did or do. De choice is lost.

(II, 36)

The only "middle ground" (or "fence") man ever knew was in the Garden of Eden where man did not have to contend with "brooding on why"; the "fate of man" is that "he comes so near, whereas he is so lost" (VII, 355).

By implication Henry is saying that there is no "middle ground" between "things and the soul." Henry is well aware of the enormous historical and theological possibilities of "things and the soul" and he has investigated some of them: "things" like the material, the real, the Other, Kant's ding-an-sich; and "souls" like the rational soul, the incorporeal soul, the conscious soul, the eternal soul. "If the sky resembled more the sea" then there would be some concrete connections between the physical and the ethereal which would allow us to construct a more concrete metaphysics. (Compare Henry on Wallace Stevens: "that metaphysics/he hefted up until we would not breath the physics" [VI, 219].) One fusion of opposites, Henry concludes, is an awareness; he settles for that, "awareness was most of what he had" (VII, 37), but the most assured fusion between "things and the soul" is its secular version, loving and caring for another person. Henry is no longer self-centered, "huffy," "sulking," and "unappeasable"; his private and selfish concerns have been transformed into a concern for others. He "scolds" his heavy daughter, not in an angry reproach but in a persistence of "scolding it out" (Henry "never liked brains-/it's the texture & the thought [V, 95]; he reaches "into the corner" of his brain "to have it out" [VII, 305]). Henry is a "scold" in several senses: in the seldom used sense of using violent or unseemly language in vituperation; in the sense of quarrelling and brawling noisily; and in the sense of the Old Norse meaning of skald, the poet and in a sense, the lampooner. The Dream Songs ends but Henry will struggle as long as he lives; the line "my heavy daughter," set typographically apart so that it nearly spills off the page, suggests that the scolding will continue and that once again Henry is "making ready to move on" (III, 77). Like Frost, he will continue his "lover's quarrel with the world."

## II. 1. The Clarity of a Muffled Purpose

To read and to understand The Dream Songs as a whole is an elusive and disconcerting venture, but most will agree that The Dream Songs is an important American long poem. Consider the title, The Dream Songs. There is a disconcerting complexity, ambiguity, and contradiction about "Dream Songs." The title does not clearly imply if the songs are about dreams or if the songs are dreams. The first Song does not clarify the ambiguity; the reader cannot be sure who "I" and "they" are:

Huffy Henry hid the day  
 unappeasable Henry sulked.  
 I see his point,-- a trying to put things over.  
 It was the thought that they thought  
 they could do it made Henry wicked & away.

(I, 1)

(The "they" may be the social taboos reinforcing the superego or simply "the enemy"; the "I" may be the poet or Henry.) The implication seems to be that the Songs are at once about "huffy" Henry's dream and are his dreams. In fact, so many critics "went so desperately astray" that Berryman, in the preface to His Toy, His Dream, His Rest, clarified the point: Henry "... talks about himself sometimes in the first person, sometimes in the third, sometimes even in the second" (p.ix). As the reader becomes more familiar with the Songs, as he "hears" and "feels" them, the ambiguity slowly draws him into the poem.

Some readers are likely to be made uneasy by Berryman's announcement that Henry's dreams will be "sung" (just as many were when Whitman announced that he would "sing" about the self). But they should not forget that traditionally poets, particularly if they were prophetic or epic poets, did "sing"; "the soul" Henry says, "not talks but sings" (VII, 352). Thomas Carlyle made some helpful distinctions between mere "metrical

poetry" and "Song" Song, he said, goes deep; metrical poetry merely jingles on the surface:

All old Poems, Homeric and the rest, are authentically Songs. I would say in strictness that all right Poems are; that whatsoever is not sung is properly no Poem, but a piece of prose cramped into jingling lines, -- to the great injury of the grammar, to the great grief of the reader, for most part! 1

Then Carlyle turns to Dante's Divine Comedy:

I give Dante my highest praise when I say of his Divine Comedy that it is, in all senses, genuinely a Song. In the very sound of it there is a canto formo; it proceeds as by a chant. The language, his simple terza rima, doubtless helped him in this. One reads along naturally with a sort of lilt. But I add, that it could not be otherwise; for the essence and material of the work are themselves rhythmic. Its depth, and rapt passion and sincerity, makes it musical; -- go deep enough, there is music everywhere. A true inward symmetry, what one calls an architectural harmony, reigns in it, proportionates it all: architectural; which also partakes of the character of music. 2

So The Dream Songs has "an architectural harmony" which "partakes of the character of music," a complex and "difficult" rhythm which draws the work into the "deep structures" of the whole human round.

But The Dream Songs is not sung in the classic manner: the rhythms are modern, staccato, jazzy. Henry is "shot full of sings" (II, 54); his gramophone is the most powerful in the country" (VI, 204); he hums a "short blues" (II, 50); he sings drunkenly, "I have a sing to shay" (VII, 305); and he sings a song "the like of which may bring your heart to break" (V, 143). He sings out of need and he sings out of instinct; "not that we would assert/particulars" he says, "but animal; cats mew,/horses scream,

1. Carlyle, Heroes and Hero Worship, p.90.
2. For a parallel description of the structure of a novel, see Aldous Huxley's Point Counter Point, "from Philip Quarles's Notebook": "Meditate on Beethoven. The changes of moods, the abrupt transitions. (Majesty alternating with joke, for example, in the first movement of the B flat major quartet. Comedy suddenly hinting at prodigious and tragic solemnities in the scherzo of the C sharp minor quartet.) More interesting still the modulations, not merely from one key to another, but from mood to mood. A theme is stated, then developed, pushed out of shape, imperceptibly deformed, until, though still recognizably the same, it has become quite different. In sets of variations the process is carried a step further. Those incredible Diabelli variations for example. The whole range of thought and feeling, yet all in organic relation to a ridiculous little waltz tune." Point Counter Point (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1955), pp.297-98.

man sing" (II, 41). His "instinctive sings" recall the ancient singers who bade the Muse to assist them in their need to sing a noble song. Behind Berryman's Songs, as Henry explains, stretch scores of "music ancient & gradual" (VII, 382). Henry and his fellow poets sing "the new forms in which ancient thought appears" (VII, 282), which suggests that in The Dream Songs one will find more than songs that are about dreams or dreams that are songs. The important point to remember about music and song is that Henry hopes to become enveloped in the harmony of music. Henry depends on something like

the slow movement of Schubert's Sonata in A  
& the mysterious final soundings  
of Beethoven's 109-10-11 & Diabelli Variations  
You go by the rules but there the rules don't matter  
is what I've been trying to say.

(V, 204)

Like Beethoven's Diabelli Variations, The Dream Songs is diabolical, sharply alternating between pain and exultation, the ethereal and the tumultuous, serenity and passion, loss and rebirth, but always enigmatic.

Significantly, Henry sees "with Tolstoyan clarity/his muffled purpose" (VII, 370) (my italics), for just as the power of Tolstoy's War and Peace does not depend on philosophic, historical, or psycho-analytic theory, or even the vast panorama of a whole society, but on a whole rich tapestry of human experience, so The Dream Songs weaves a rich tapestry. As Berryman says of Anna Karenina, "one does not... rush on from chapter to chapter... just to see what happens."<sup>1</sup> The "Tolstoyan clarity" of a "muffled purpose" invests in the Songs a paradoxical measure of kinetic and powerless energy. Henry's understanding of his father, mother, children, wives, women, sex, friends, loss, fear, loneliness, guilt, forgiveness, and love; his interest in and anxiety over war, politics, religion, history, philosophy, psycho-analysis, and literature comprise the Tolstoyan vision within which he seeks clarity and resolve.

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1. Berryman, "Through Dreiser's Imagination the Tides of Real Life Billowed," p.29.

At first amidst the jazzy talk, fragmented sentences, ambiguous and shifting meanings, and seemingly unrelated references, the reader understandably has a problem orienting himself. Some Songs make vivid impressions; some hover in a marginal fog of understanding. But, as the reader progresses, a rhythm takes hold, and each Song begins to form a definite whole; what at first seems a collection of separate and fragmented lyrics almost read with the ease of a narrative as Karl Shapiro recognized even when the Songs were first published: "The Dream Songs reads from page to page with the insistence of a novel."<sup>1</sup> While the Songs do not read with an ease of linear movement from one event to another, once we know what is important to Henry, the circle of his thought and experience can be remade into a chronological narrative. In other words, The Dream Songs may not have a linear narrative, but it does have a logical and coherent narrative.

The basic situation, as Berryman described it, is quite simple:

The basic situation is that of a modern man, early in middle age (41 to 51), pretending to be a Negro, that is to say, a minstrel in black-face, throughout, who has a friend who calls him Mr. Bones. The man is sometimes called Henry and sometimes called other things. His last name is in doubt. He endures and enjoys what is presented to him by contemporary American life. 2

The wholeness of The Dream Songs is, therefore the unifying consciousness of Henry, and what Henry endures and enjoys over an eleven-year period comprises the narrative of the Songs. The plot of The Dream Songs develops sequentially in stages of Henry's life from 41 to 51. Each of the seven Books represents a stage of both Henry's development and of the plot, and a few of the events in Henry's journey will help to see the insistence of a narrative. In Part I, we meet childish Henry. He is "baffled" by all about him, and he takes refuge in a stage routine, a mask of the end man of a minstrel show. His opposite end man, who calls Henry Mr. Bones, makes

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1. Karl Shapiro, "Major Poets of the Ex-English Language," Washington Post Book World, 26 January 1969, p.4.
  2. Sisson, "My Whiskers Fly : An Interview with John Berryman," pp.16-17.

fun of Henry calling him "Sir." Henry's appetites, particularly his sexual appetites, are bestial, and he seems to wish to bury himself in passion. He is "at odds with the world & its God"; he regards his wife as a "complete nothing." He is nostalgic for the heroic black and white world of the movies of the 1930's: the hero Bogart, "the race in Ben Hur," "The Prisoner of Shark Island with Paul Muni." But nothing is clear to Henry; fear dogs him. Henry, the "human American man," cannot find his way and in general, "life, friends, is boring" to him. Henry broods on death and the dead: Roethke, a friend and fellow poet dies and Henry wishes to die. He compares the "teenage cancer" in America today with ideals of Thomas Jefferson a hundred and fifty years before, but feels that those ideals were all in vain. Now America has weak leaders like Eisenhower who "lays" in the White House. "Servant" Henry continues however; he lectures, travels distant places and on occasion is happy with his "possibilities." He makes up "stories lighting the past of Henry" and delights in the euphoria of fantasy. The Book concludes reiterating Henry's being at odds with the world, his interest "in women's bodies" and the trouble it causes. He makes a hollow plea to God for a sense of others, and he considers it a "marvellous piece of luck" that he dies (spiritually) so that he does not have to be responsible for or realize anything.

Part II begins with Henry on the green Ganges delta. He feels a stranger in a foreign land and longs to join friends who are dead. Henry is still in the dark and alone; he sees no end and feels imprisoned. He laments the heavy things on his heart; he feels the reproach of his lust and the misery of a loss (his father's suicide) both of which cause Henry to be defeated before he even attempts to make good. He nostalgically remembers the "possibilities" of his boyhood aspiration to be an archaeologist, but the pain of the present awakes him. He longs to write his way out of misery and turbulence so that he will not feel that he has lived in vain.

Again Henry retreats into sex. He continues to despair over his surroundings, "the increasingly fanatical Americans/cannot govern themselves." The memory of his father's suicide closes in upon him in the form of a grizzly bear, and again he feels held back by the memory. Christmas holds no joy for Henry; he attends a Modern Language Association convention in "the capital city for Dull." As Robert Frost is dying, the "professional-friends-of-Robert-Frost" gather footnotes on the "old gentleman." Henry laments the death of Frost, for the "stoic diety" of a hero is gone, "You look up and who's there?" He envies Frost who is "in the clear," but for Henry, left behind, "nothing's the same." His fear and loneliness return, everyone seems to be going somewhere, seems to be purposeful, but not Henry who is scared of himself, and regards himself, ironically, as "free, black & forty-one." His surroundings continue to reflect his own state of mind in the massacre of Polish Jews in a concentration camp. His dreams return to his father's suicide, the blight that split "his manward chances." But he decides that he must think it out, his blight "across in the freezing wind." Henry marries again and expects happiness but does not find it: "He stared at ruin. Ruin stared back." He feels imprisoned again; Henry is an "un-." All about "incredible panic rules" reflecting his own state. He follows other deaths into grief and despair; this time he laments the "death of love." He begins to question why he "sleeps & sleeps and sleeps," but his waking is like death. Henry lies in weakness and disorder, and he hums a short blues. Part II ends with Henry trapped in his (and man's) "wounds to time." His wife has left him, and he seems a dead man "radioactive."

Part III opens with Henry in hospital, "doing time" but "growing wise." The terrible burden of freedom is too much for Henry. Alone and fragmented, Henry wonders if ever again he will "be on the lookout for w<sup>me</sup>n & milk,/honour & love." In the qu<sup>i</sup>etness "the thing took hold"; at this point we do not know what "the thing" is but we learn by the end of this

Part that Henry, unlike his earlier desire to "get movin'," is now "ready to move on." Henry compulsively attempts to shut out the outside world but he cannot: "He lay in the middle of the world, and twitcht." He begins to consider "programmes" for himself as he realizes that he has been using his "own skin for wallpaper" and he "cannot win." Treated like a helpless baby in the hospital, he realizes that he has been "operating from nothing," and he begins to feel shot "full of stings." Without the aid of rules, he begins to write down as briefly as he can the order of what matters to him. He continues to feel the rejection of Heaven, for his "application" to enter Heaven fails: it is as though St. Peter has betrayed him before he applies. Henry, "full of the death of guilt," feels he is about to die again. With his new wife and son, he looks hopefully into the future, but finds no answers to solve "the dilemma of the Ancient of Days." His desires take hold again, and Henry lives immaturely "in a state of chortle sin." While others give up, Henry still "perplexes" himself; "his brain is on fire." He flies over the world, has a "Meditation in the Kremlin" and identifies with the "immemorial moans" of the Negroes in the South who struggle for equal rights. All of Henry's meditations reflect his own struggle and sense of futility. Henry feels the futility of his own struggle to survive. Nevertheless, because of his need, Henry continues, asking for anybody's blessing, but receiving none. Again Christmas holds no meaning for him, a "fractured cat"; he retreats from the world and reproaches himself for his sad bestial life: "Henry got hot, got laid, felt bad, survived." He attempts once again to perform "in complete darkness operations of great delicacy" on himself. For the moment he has developed those qualities of practical-mindedness and civic responsibility that seem to be requisites for survival in a complex civilization. But love he knows not; he continues to desire young women and prays for a "personal experience of the body of Mrs. Boogry" before he "passes from lust." Few people listen to his poems (his "daughters"); the poems seem

"drunk"; but little matter, through them "Henry's perhaps to break his burnt-cork luck." Still hating the world, Henry does not see that "the holy cities" make up for "the horror of unlove." He settles for "tasting all the secret bits of life." The seasons come and go but "savage & thoughtful" Henry survives. He joins his father in "a modesty of death." Part III ends with Henry, tired of everything he has endured, "stript down to move on"; he has a book in either hand (77 Dream Songs and His Toy, His Dream, His Rest), and "ancient fires for eyes, his head full/ & his heart full."

Part IV, the center of The Dream Songs in plot, theme and structure, comprises fourteen Songs. As a whole the Book is the turning point or climax of the action, for fragmented Henry "dies" and returns to life with a plan. Within the fourteen Songs the plot turns, like a sonnet, after the first eight Songs; in the last six Songs hope dominates. After Henry is buried in the eighth Song, he feels at the beginning of the ninth Song that "the conclusion is growing." In the course of Part IV much happens to Henry: he begins creating poems more seriously for they "signal his fiery passage"; his body is buried "at a distance" but it is not forgotten; void of "Love & ruth" he begins his search for love and compassion and he waits for his Lady to guide him; he accepts the inevitability of death and the fact that he is growing old and will die -- thus "panic died"; finally, Henry, who has promised to return to life "adult & difficult," pushes off fear and returns to life with "a plan, a stratagem" like "Lazarus with a plan to get his own back."

For all of his dramatic promise of change in Part IV, Part V begins the extremely slow process of a fuller, more realized transformation in Henry and as a result little happens to him. The blackness somewhere "in the vistas of his heart" plagues him still. Love "takes over" but he continues to struggle with a realization of mature love. His Lady now

figures more prominently in his life: he insists that her birthday (and by implication his own rebirth) "must be honoured." He misses the lusts of his body, but he desires to be more faithful to his Lady. Even though he has accepted the inevitability of death, the death of friends still racks him with grief. He tires of all this dying, his own included, and again he reassures himself in a sobriety of negative courage that "we do all die." Christmas now holds more joy for Henry; Henry is delivered "from the gale." A new concern arises in Henry; he grows famous as a poet, and he begins to question, "what is fame?" Fame makes him lazy; but he is making some progress now, and he must do his best to continue under his new burden. The most significant developments end Part V. Henry now understands more fully what his father's suicide has done to him. His father committed suicide when Henry was twelve years old and it "wiped out" his childhood. He now sympathizes more with his father and recognizes that he loves his father, and Part V ends with Henry trying to forgive him.

Though Part VI is the lengthiest of the Songs, the narrative development is not. It opens with Henry more hopeful than in any previous book: "These lovely motions of the air, the breeze/tell me I'm not in hell." The dead lie around him, but he recognizes for the first time that they dramatize "lively Henry." The first ten poems lament the death of his friend and fellow poet Delmore Schwartz who died alone in a New York apartment, apparently a suicide. In his grief the world about him seems "lunatic" and a place where he "does not care to be anymore." A whole generation of poets have been "taken" by God: Theodore Roethke, Richard Blackmur, Randall Jarrell, and Sylvia Plath. And society does not treat its poets well; later in Part VI two Songs are dedicated to a young Russian poet Joseph Brodsky who was tried for "parasitism." But Henry recovers from his "block of agony" and pursues the secrets that he may yet come to

understand "hidden in history & theology, hidden in rhyme." His lust diminishes somewhat, and in fact his "lust quest" seems to be over. Mature love begins to take hold more firmly; he does not keep assigning the same value "to the concept 'love'." But love is still a "concept"; Henry still has far to go. His Lady guides him and shows him a "swifely grace that's up from grace." He marries her, and for the first time he says "I love you" to a woman. In the birth of their daughter Martha ("Twiss"), his love deepens -- Henry is becoming more considerate and sensitive to others; when a student comes to him with problems, he weeps for her. Henry's art truly starts in Part VI; he can now more confidently strain "his eyes, his brain, and his nervous system for a beginning"; his poems become "one odd way to Paradise." Near the end of Part VI, Henry finally forgives his father for committing suicide. At the end of this Part, Henry, whose house is firm now, takes his family to Ireland to ~~stay~~ stay a year; the "old survival test" continues as they "get on toward the sea."

Leaving America, "the country of the dead," Henry sails for Ireland at the beginning of Part VII. He is full of his highest resolve; he promises that his "whole year will be tense with love" and that he will "craft" better than ever before. Henry is now more decisive, hopeful and purposeful than he ever has been. Partly out of age and partly out of resolve, he lays to rest the dragon lust. He is tempted to be unfaithful to his wife but he is not. On the question of what fame is, Henry decides that fame corrupts and he reacts against it; he decides that fame is something that should be personal, "a lone letter from a young man." Henry's love extends to a sensitive gentle concern for others; he tries to help two old ladies with problems; he tries to help a woman who has many of the same problems as himself; and he cannot bear to turn beggars away from his door. His quarrel with God is never completely resolved, and so he settles for grace. As for the "secrets" that he wishes to understand, he settles for glimpses of knowledge. As time passes in Ireland, Henry feels more and

more an alien and desires to return home to America, and he does so happily with his family. He finally lays to rest the ghost of his father and is released from the curse of his past. The Songs end with Henry appropriately celebrating an American Thanksgiving, but emphasizing once again that nothing is resolved completely.

As the narrative develops, what Henry endures is clear enough: "Turbulence: the modern world, and memory, wants."<sup>1</sup> But what Henry enjoys is more complex. For example, he enjoys sex: "I made love, lolled,/ my rondel lowers. I ache less. I purr" (V, 99), but sex as an entertainment of instinct leads inevitably to sadness: "Henry is half in love with one of his students/and the sad process continues..." (V, 121). On the whole, there seems to be a disparity in quantity between what Henry endures and what he enjoys; Henry enjoys few things, all temporarily: "Happiness was ours too but did not stay" (VII, 328). In fact Henry endures so much that his very survival becomes a source of joy:

Henry with joy lay down for his next bout of rest,  
in happy expectation of the next  
assault on his divided soul.

(VII, 317)

This, then, is the basic unifying narrative of The Dream Songs -- a descriptive record of Henry's personal struggles. He is like Walt Whitman, who, as Berryman notes in his essay on Whitman, wrote his poems mainly out of need, the "outcroppings of my own emotional and personal nature," Whitman said. Whitman attempted "from first to last, to put a Person, a human being (myself in the latter part of the Nineteenth Century, in America), freely, fully and truly on record."<sup>2</sup> The Dream Songs has been called "confessional"<sup>3</sup>

1. Berryman, "One Answer to a Question," p.130.
2. Cited by Richard Kelly in his review of a recent collection of Berryman's essays The Freedom of the Poet, a copy of which I have not been able to obtain at this writing. "'Hurrah' for Berryman! His prose book is a 'beauty'," Minneapolis Tribune, May 23, 1976, p.12D.
3. See M.L. Rosenthal, The New Poets: American and British Poetry Since World War II (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp.118-30.

because Henry's struggle to survive seems a personal one and because Henry's struggle parallels Berryman's life at many points.<sup>1</sup> When Berryman was asked in an interview how he reacted to the label "confessional poet" he replied, "With rage and contempt! Next question."<sup>2</sup> And understandably so. While Henry's personal struggles are the subject of The Dream Songs, Berryman always had an eye out for their general rather than their personal significance. "Man" and Henry have much in common:

Man all tossed  
& lost with groin-wounds by grand bulls....

(II, 36)

Man has undertaken the top job of all,  
son fin. Good luck.

(II, 46)

Our wounds to time, from all other times,  
Sea-times slow, the times of galaxies  
fleeing, the dwarf's dead times,  
lessen so little that if here in his crude rimes  
Henry them mentions, do not hold it, please,  
for putting man down.

(II, 51)

... let's exchange blue-black kisses  
for the fate of Man....

(VI, 200)

... so complex, man.

(VI, 247)

Weep for the fate of man, excellent lady.  
He comes no near, whereas he is so lost....

(VII, 355)

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1. Much could be made of the similarities between Henry and John Berryman. As A. Alvarez notes, "when the inevitable Definitive Berryman arrives, it will be black with footnotes matching the text with the poet's biography!! For now the task is to tap the poem itself. See A. Alvarez, "Berryman's Nunc dimittis," The Observer 4 May 1969, p.30.
  2. Stitt, "The Art of Poetry : An Interview with John Berryman, p.181.

Clearly, Henry's personal "confessed" struggle suggests the general human condition as well.

Despite the poet's overtures to Henry's general human condition, Henry himself comprises the plot. Who then is this character who struts and frets like some comic and satanic character in a morality play? Pompous and modest, learned and ignorant, cowardly and brave, lecherous and loving, shattered and whole, fantasizing and realistic, responsible and irresponsible, self-pitying and brave, victim and master, famous and infamous, Henry entertains, debates, celebrates, recalls and laments. Henry<sup>1</sup> is the modern hero, the underdog as hero, a comical idealist, the solitary outcast, the "imaginary" Jew and Blackman; he is Willie Loman, Leopold Bloom, J. Alfred Prufrock, Flem Snopes, Emperor Jones, Ishmael, and Don Quixote; and yet, he has something of the nobility of Hamlet and the shrewdness of Odysseus. He is the wayfaring Christian of the Augustinian spiritual journey; the modern Wordsworth set out on his own educational journey; a middle aged Huckleberry Finn, "his spirit full with Mark Twain" (V, 170). He is the picaresque of the picaresque tradition: the admirable, interesting, and loveable rogue who lives by his wits, gets into trouble and out of it as he travels through society.

Henry's strength and sheer courage to survive his journey rely on the special vigor and humor, honesty, and awareness that not only sustain him but also compel our admiration. Humorously, Henry clowns from one delicious (a favorite Berryman word) female to the next:

Henry & Phoebe happy as cockroaches  
in the world-kitchen woofed, with all away.

(II, 31)

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1. The very name Henry in modern American or English does not have the regal connotation it once held in England. In fact, Berryman chose Henry because it was his least favorite name: "... my second wife and I once agreed that the names Mabel and Henry are the most detestable of all names...." Sisson, p.18. Berryman notes, too, that Henry has no particular literary origin, despite attempts to compare Hemingway's Henry of A Farewell to Arms and Stephen Crane's Henry of The Red Badge of Courage.

Henry of Donnybrook bred like a pig,  
bred when he was brittle, bred when big,  
how he's sweating to support them.

(V, 97)

He published his girl's bottom in staid pages  
of an old weekly.

(V, 122)

He clowns at a Modern Language Association convention:

Hey, out there! -- assistant professors, full,  
associates, -- instructors -- others -- any --  
I have a sing to shay.

(II, 35)

He interviews St. Peter with a casual wryness to enter heaven:

Peter's not friendly. He gives me sideways looks.  
The architecture is far from reassuring.  
I feel uneasy.  
A pity, -- the interview began so well  
I mentioned fiendish things, he waved them away  
and sloshed out a martini....

(III, 55)

Sometimes he laughs off heavy drinking:

Why drink so, two days running?  
two months, 0 seasons, years, two decades running?  
I answer (smiles) my question on the cuff:  
Man, I been thirsty.

(V, 96)

and he puns both ridiculously and cleverly:

Poll-cats are coming, hurrah, hurrah.  
I votes in my hole.

(I, 2)

Fate winged me....

(II, 42)

Spellbound held subtle Henry all his four  
hearers in the racket of the market....

(III, 71)

I am fleeing double....

(VI, 114)

Siezure is gall.

(VI, 228)

But for all of Henry's clowning, his sense of the comic complements his honesty with himself: comedy is not only his form of self-appraisal but also prevents Henry from drooping into self-pity, which he is prone to do. For example his lecherousness, which leads to "the sad process" (V, 121), is tagged accurately: "a state of chortle sin."

Sometimes, however, he is more straightforwardly honest than humorous:

Love her he doesn't but the thought he puts  
into that young woman  
would launch a national product  
complete with TV sports & sky writing  
outlets in Bonn & Tokyo....

(III, 69)

And even when he wishes to be dishonest with himself he cannot be:

Henry was not a coward. Much.

(I, 13)

He was always in love with the wrong woman  
we can't go on here, which would not be nice  
or true.

(VI, 213)

And I am bored. That's a lie.

(VI, 249)

I cross my heart  
& hope to die but not this year.

(VI, 265)

It's time to settle down --  
but not yet.

(VII, 332)

The Augustinian ring of the last two examples in particular emphasizes not only Henry's innate honesty but also his self-awareness. In fact, both Henry's sense of humor and his sense of honesty have their roots in his awareness. Awareness is part of what Henry sees with "Tolstoyan clarity":

When he dressed up & up, his costumes varied  
with the southeast wind, but he remains aware.  
Awareness was most of what he had.

(VII, 370)

Admirable as Henry's awareness might be, it indicates a passive state. To be aware is but one stage in the progress towards self-realization and self-unity. By the conclusion of The Dream Songs we recognize that something more active than awareness has happened to a changed Henry. Less obvious expressions of this change stretch over long distances; early in the Songs "the brain fever bird did scales" (I, 5) in Henry's dreams, but at the end he rejoices that "the violent winds in my gardens front & back/have driv en away my birds" (VII, 378). The active change in Henry interests us more than his passive awareness. We observe and participate in Henry's cultivation of his understanding: he learns to forgive those in his past who wounded him; he learns the difference between love and sexual desire; he learns that thought, no matter how penetrating, cannot answer the question of the cause or outcome of man's fate; he learns that art and work offer a happy man means of survival; as a famous poet he learns to wear humbly the laurels of fame; he learns not only to make a decision but also to bear the risks it imposes; he learns to accept that he (and man) is a mixture of good and evil; and he learns that he shares with all men the loss of Eden, the loss of his oneness with God which he strives to recover in his journeying life. What Henry learns, slowly and painfully in Augustinian and Wordsworthian fashion, fosters his growth towards self-understanding. In the process of expanding his knowledge and feeling, his purpose often seems muffled, but, as the field of his knowledge expands and the breadth of his feelings and experience develop, his purpose crystallizes. At the end of his groping forth, he learns that knowledge and feeling ranks as lesser truths: the greater truth being that he grows and marks a rhythmic spiral of his being.

## II. ii. The Folds and Layers of Coming to Life

The road to originality in the modern world [of poetry] lies through technical experiment with language, and the boldest is through syntax and image.

A.C. Partridge  
The Language of Modern Poetry

Life comes against not all at once but in layers.

The Dream Songs (VII, 299)

Though the basic plot of Henry's struggle to survive is simple, the tapestry of the Songs of Henry's inner life is complex. We have taken Henry's cue to regard the whole as "Tolstoyan"; in the same context, he suggests how we might view the parts:

Henry saw with Tolstoyan clarity  
his muffled purpose. He described the folds --  
not a symbol in the place.

(VII, 370)

An expansive standard like "Tolstoyan clarity" at once tempts and defeats a definitive interpretation; as we commit ourselves to the development of one Song, we find that in the very act of doing so, we exclude another of equal importance. However, in determining the parts of the whole, the "folds" and "layers," we may clearly construct the whole; we come against the work "not all at once but in layers." This approach to writing about life, both in method and manner, resembles a pursuit of James Joyce's Ulysses in which the reader pursues the meaning of a single passage or word which leads him to other related passages until finally a pattern of meaning, a definite, though not complete, interpretation emerges.

Distinguishing the folds and layers of The Dream Songs imitates Henry's own plan of digging into the layers of himself. Early in the Songs, he hints obscurely at this method: "I advanced upon/(despairing) my spumoni" (I, 4). At first one might regard a statement about advancing on ice cream as nonsense, but when he considers that Henry is talking about spumoni, an ice cream made up of layers of different colors, flavors and

textures, the meaning becomes clearer: Henry will advance upon layers -- of what we are not sure yet. In later Songs we learn that Henry will advance upon the layers of himself; he is "slowly sheared off" (IV, 78) and "his wild wit... assigned angles none" but "curve on curve" (VI, 182). Henry is "taut" (and "taught") with his vision of "folds":

... taut with his vision as it has to be,  
open & closed sings on his mystery  
furled & unfurled.

(VI, 260)

Discovering the texture and the solidity of the layers of a "whole mental life" is a slow ripening process, not merely perceiving his subject but seizing it and making it visible:

Leaving the ends aft open, touch the means,  
whereby we ripen. Touch by all means the means  
whereby we come to life,  
enduring the manner for the matter, ay  
I sing quickly, offered Henry, I  
sing more quickly.

I sing with infinite slowness finite pain  
I have reached into the corner of my brain  
to have it out.  
I sat by fires when I was young, & now  
I'm not I sit by fires again, although  
I do it more slowly.

(VII, 305)

These two stanzas constitute an implicit and an explicit statement of the rich texture of the whole process whereby the layers of Henry and The Dream Songs come to life. The explicit expression of the whole is stated straightforwardly: "I sing with infinite slowness finite pain...." The implicit expression is exemplified in the reader's slow process of stripping away the layers of meaning. On the level of a plain sense statement, Henry is saying that man should endure his finite pain which is his infinite condition. Man's pain, however, is the means whereby he grows wiser, whereby he "comes to life." But other layers of meaning, and by implication the layers of

Henry, are made manifold in double entendres and allusion. (I use double entendre both in the sense of double meaning of language and of two interpretations one of which has risqué connotations.) The first verse heavily connotes sexual activity -- the "means whereby we come to life." Viewed as a witty double entendre, the risqué connotation is humorous; viewed as a strict double entendre, the sexual meaning is a statement of man's source, the mysterious world of touching the instinctual means. The repetition of "means" ("touch the means,/whereby we ripen. Touch by all means the means") turns the almost glib phrase of encouragement "by all means" into a way of "coming to life." The second stanza shifts emphasis from instinct to intellect and suggests another "means" of coming to life; the shift seems to be an attempt to sublimate instinctual aims to mental aims. The subtle but precise folds of meaning of "having it out" of and in Henry's brain make clear the layers of Henry's struggle: his struggle is inside his brain, and because of tumultuous thought, he wishes to pluck out his brain. The indefinite antecedent "it" of course may be the "instinct" of the first stanza; Henry has reached into the corner of his brain to "think out" his instincts. His only aid to having out his instincts is age, and so the fires of instinct in his youth decrease with age. On another level, the ambiguity of the penultimate line reminds us again of Henry's crises of identity: "I sat by the fires when I was young, & now/I'm not I sit by fires again...." In one sense Henry is saying that he is no longer young; in another sense, the sense of crisis of identity, "I'm not I" is the subject of "sit" -- he sat by the instinctual fires of youth but now he sits by the mental fires of middle age.

The phrase "whereby we ripen" in the first stanza alludes to and evokes the vast world of King Lear. After Gloucester's blindness, Edgar tries to keep him from lapsing into his former pessimism:

Men must endure  
 Their going hence, even as their coming hither.  
 Ripeness is all.

(V, ii, 8-11)

Henry's view of surviving in a world of pain, injustice, and mortality is no more, no less than Edgar's. The allusion to King Lear provides a reference to another work in which the layers of man's existence are explored.

This method of scrutinizing the rhythmic texture of layers of a poem is of course an exemplary approach to any poem. In a long poem like The Dream Songs, such an approach helps us to recognize how the Songs explain each other; how across long distances a theme or an idea is expanded or redefined.

Henry sings of the "finite slowness" of exploring layers, but often he sings of "digging" into the layers. He is "Mr. Heartbreak, the New Man,/come to farm a crazy-land..." (I, 5). Henry would wish to be Dante and Rimbaud:

... each dug down for himself a definite hole  
 in a definite universe which he could  
 bring to mind structured....

(VII, 348)

Henry wishes to dig a definite "hole" ("whole" as well) especially into his past which he has "shovelled out of sight" (VI, 207). Paradoxically, the past has dug into him:

Notes in the sullen ground  
 are not passed, or found.  
 Their solitude is great & dug to last....

(VI, 268)

The grinding drill of "was & will" (past and future) digs into Henry.

The drill was after or is into him.  
 Whirr went a bite. He should not feel/his bad.  
 A truly first class drill.  
 Nothing distinctly hurts. It reminds him.  
 - Like it makes you blink, Mr. Bones, of was & will?  
 - Very much so.

(VI, 185)

And forces outside and inside Henry dig him up:

Noises from underground made gibber some,  
others collected & dug Henry up....

(IV, 91)

In turn, in order for Henry to survive, he himself must dig:

... insomnia-plagued, with a shovel  
digging like mad, Lazarus with a plan  
to get his own back, a plan, a stratagem  
no newsman will unravel.

(IV, 91)

Throughout The Dream Songs Henry reminds himself and the reader that he has "a plan," "a programme," of digging into the layers of himself in order to form a definite whole; the facts of a newsman are not enough, something more is required.

Henry's plan of digging into his layers determines the method of the Songs: the layers of Henry become clearer as we learn (and he learns) more about his concerns, his wants, and his needs. Often the layers become clear because we come to understand the event or crisis which concern Henry. Another way to illustrate Henry's "digging" is through his syntax, what Lowell called a "disrupted and mended syntax."<sup>1</sup> A simple example will illustrate: Henry broods on the paralyzing ghosts of his past, and "often he reckons, in the dawn, them up" (II, 29). The syntax of this short statement is disrupted enough to isolate the three elements of the sentence: Henry's "reckoning," "the dawn," and "them," (i.e. the ghosts of the past). These three elements fuse into a complete statement, but each in isolation suggests notably clear layers of meaning. Henry "reckons," then, in several senses: he recalls, he considers, he estimates, he settles accounts with, and he depends on the ghosts of the past. He reckons "in the dawn,"

1. Lowell, "For John Berryman," p.4. Lowell saw the origin of Berryman's style in the 1940's: "John could quote with vibrance to all lengths, even prose, even late Shakespeare, to show me what could be done with disrupted and mended syntax. This was the start of his real style."

a time hovering between the light and the darkness, between the conscious and the unconscious, and between death and life. And finally, he reckons "them up": he awakens and he brings to life, "them." The syntax, though disrupted, mends itself in the complex folds of Henry's problems and preoccupations.

Some readers have been perplexed and distracted by Berryman's style in The Dream Songs. For some, his style is too cute; it "rattles" in their ears. But some, and not all in print as Berryman observed, have recanted as Robert Lowell did. Of 77 Dream Songs he said: "I misjudged them, and was rattled by their mannerisms."<sup>1</sup> Considered as a whole, the style becomes much smoother and less distorted in the progress of The Dream Songs and, by implication, reflects Henry's progress from childishness and fragmentation to a maturity and wholeness. To this extent the distorted style of the first three Parts is a mask. Oblique and personal references and twisted syntax protect and reflect a tortured soul. Frederick Seidel stresses Berryman's fragmented style as a reflection of the world about Henry:

Perhaps the modern world has been so nightmarish that a writer can feel required to use disguising and enhancing techniques analogous to those used in dream work -- perhaps a truly accurate naturalism must show a dream world America of repetitive, sudden, wish-fulfilling shifts of scene; of familiar objects that gleam with horror and absurd humour; an America of abortive, seemingly unconnected vignettes which illustrate vengeance, humiliation, thwarted this and that. 2

(Seidel's illuminating insight here reminds one of Berryman's passion for the cinema.) Certainly a fragmented style does reflect a fragmented Henry and perhaps a fragmented world (one must remember throughout that we see the world through Henry's dreams). But such a view of Berryman's style stops short of a further, more obvious observation; Seidel notes: "... I think that it is just that Berryman found he prospered with a style

1. Ibid.

2. Frederick Seidel, "Berryman's Dream Songs", Poetry Vol.105 (January, 1965), 257.

that allowed him such concentration of material and such freedom, and allowed his humor."<sup>1</sup> A style, in other words, in which Berryman furled and unfurled his folds of meaning in dreams; "a style stern, wicked & sweet" (VII, 323); a style that is "black jade at all seasons" and "burning leaves" and "a shelving of moss over each planted face" (VI, 191).

Disrupting syntax does not always create layers of meaning; sometimes Berryman botches syntax simply to come down heavily upon a word or a point:

I don't see how Henry, pried  
open for all the world to see, survived.

(I, 1)

The glories of the world struck me, made me  
aria, once.

(II, 26)

Came a day when none, though he began  
in his accustomed way on the filthy steps  
in a crash of waters, came.

(III, 71)

Similarly, Berryman breaks syntax typographically for us to linger over, isolate and fire a new emphasis. "Life comes against not all at once but in layers" (VII, 299) is a good example, but there others:

I overlook the hopeless spectacle  
with pity & love & almost perfect admiration....

(VI, 262)

Henry tried the world again & again,  
falling short of the mark.

(VII, 359)

Long so years since stops I may (ah)  
expect a fresh version of living....

(VII, 380)

If there were a middle ground between things  
and the soul....

(VII, 385)

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1. Ibid.

A typographical break in syntax may coerce an ambiguity as well, as in the opening line of The Dream Songs: "Huffy Henry hid the day...", (I, 1). Henry's hiding is emphasized but ambiguously so, the suggestions being that Henry hid from the day, that Henry hid the length of a day, and that Henry hid the day from others.

Rearranging phrases and placing a word so that its meaning turns about several times creates the same effect of disrupting but mending into folds of meaning. A standard turn of phrase like "trying to hit the nail on the head," Berryman turns again: "No more dally, trying to hit the head on the nail" (I, 18). Several meanings might be extended from this new turn: the emphasis shifts from his trying to hit or establish clearly a precise point to the idea of hitting one's head, "without a think" as he says in the next line; and there is the sense of hanging one's head on a nail in order to secure it. A single word strategically placed for ambiguous effect is Berryman's favorite technique: "Fell Henry back into the original crime..." (I, 26). "Fell" functions both as a verb and an adjective: "Henry fell back" and "fallen Henry" which fits logically with "the original crime." In a later Song Henry again refers ambiguously to his studies of the Fall: "He'd 've run off to sea/(but for his studies careful of the Fall)..." (V, 141). "Careful" placed where it is suggests Henry's meticulous, concerned study and his awareness and caution of the Fall.

Distorting syntax and ambiguously placing words were a Berryman signature before The Dream Songs, particularly in Homage to Mistress Bradstreet, but another of Berryman's techniques (it cannot truly be called an aspect of style) for creating levels of meaning is a use of ambiguous pronouns. He intends that the reader not only observe but also be included in the process of the life we lead, much the same as Dante involves the reader and himself in the opening line of the Divine Comedy: "Midway in our life's journey, I

went astray" (My italics). Compare, "It was wet & white & swift and where I am/we don't know" (I, 28) (My italics). The process that the reader observes throughout expands both the reader's understanding of Henry and Henry's understanding of himself. Henry speaks of himself in the singular and in the plural, "sometimes in the first person, sometimes in the third, and sometimes even in the second":<sup>1</sup>

I've had enough of this dying.  
 You've done me a dozen goodneses; get well.  
 Fight again for our own.  
 Henry felt baffled, in the middle of the thing.

(My italics)

(V, 119)

One might argue, as Patricia Bremner has, that these shifting pronouns depict the struggle of Henry's ego, id, and superego: "I" is the ego or self, "he" is the id or unconscious, and "you" is the super-ego or conscience.<sup>2</sup> The ego, in this case Henry, is a poor creature who owes service to three masters: the external world ("they"), the libido of the id, and the severity of the super-ego. She makes a persuasive argument emphasizing Henry's process of self-creation. Her argument sets up the tensions and insists on the process of unifying "I" "he," and "you" into "we" so that the folds and layers of Henry make one "whole" life.

## II. iii. The Significance of Dreams

No man when conscious attains to true or inspired intuition,  
 but rather when the power of intellect is fettered in sleep  
 or by disease or dementia.

Plato, Phaedrus

After The Dream Songs was published as a complete poem in 1969, Robert Bly reviewed it in a Minneapolis newspaper. There should be nothing

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1. Berryman, His Toy, His Dream, His Rest, p.ix.
  2. Patricia Ann Bremner, John Berryman's Dream Songs: Manner and Matter, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Kent State University, 1970.

significant in Ely, a native of Minnesota, reviewing for a paper in his native state, but in this case, it betrays an eagerness for diatribe. It was as though Ely sent a personal letter to Berryman who lived in Minneapolis. But such pronouncements as "this is cute and disgusting" and "stupid statements like that are predictable" and such patronizing advice as "readers interested in good contemporary poetry should not go to this book" carry with them their own discredit. Even when Ely would attempt a witty barb, his factual statement that dreams have nothing to do with The Dream Songs causes him to blunder again: "Berryman's 'Dream Songs,' so much admired, have nothing to do with dreams, but are essentially witticisms about Kierkegaard."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, Ely is right in saying that The Dream Songs was (and is) much admired; one need only enumerate the awards and recount the praise from most critics who were not engulfed by their eagerness. And, too, Ely's review is broadly instructive on two points: first, there seem to be no in-between views of The Dream Songs, and second, there seems to be an underestimation of the significance of dreams to the Songs. Perhaps some of those who have misgivings about The Dream Songs would appreciate it more by looking closer at dreams as integral to the whole work. Such a scrutiny would in fact locate not only the rhythms of its coherency but also its craftsmanship and art.

In the preface to 77 Dream Songs, Berryman insisted on the importance of dreams to the whole work: "Many opinions and errors in the Songs are to be referred not to the character Henry, still less to the author, but to the title of the work." "Errors in the Songs," however, is misleading. Intrinsic to a long view of Henry's dreams are vital structures rather than haphazard errors; there is an undulating framework, or, to shift the emphasis, a rhythm of dream-work. Observing someone's

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1. Robert Ely, "A 'Garage Sale' of Berryman's Poetry," Minneapolis Tribune December 13, 1970, p.11E.

dreams is not a scattered, haphazard way of penetrating the layers of the subconscious, but rather a means of discovering the living structure or structures that the subconscious creates. In dreams these "structures," however, are not rigid; they take shape through an unconscious process of the dreamer's ordering and making preferential selections and substitutions of his experience -- what Freud called distortion, displacement and condensation. In the same way, discernible moving patterns and decodeable, animated emblems shape the whirling mosaic of Henry's dreams; his "errors" are created by distortion, displacement, and condensation.

From the earliest historical evidence we know that the apparent wisdom in dreams has fascinated mankind. Primitive man seems to have held a firm persuasion of their importance, even to his everyday affairs. Accounts of dreams, dream visions, and dream allegory comprise an important part of our literature: Joseph in the Old Testament, St. Paul in the New Testament, gods and goddesses visiting mortals in dream in the Iliad and the Odyssey, dream allegories in the Middle Ages such as The Romance of the Rose, The Pearl, The Vision of Piers Plowman, The House of Fame, and the Divine Comedy. In drama, from Shakespeare to Strindberg, dream has been used as an effective dramatic device. Poets of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries were attracted to dream as a stimulus to the imagination; Blake, Keats and Yeats regarded dream as a symbol of the imagination. In the early twentieth century, dream became nearly synonymous with psycho-analysis and the impact on modern literature reflects the alliance. But in the history of dreams, whatever the theory of the origin of dreams (i.e. physiological, personal reminiscence, racial reminiscence, or premonitory), or whatever the theory of form or formlessness of dreams has been, man has felt that "we are such stuff/As dreams are made on," will be made on, or wish to be made on. We have always regarded dreams as a source of wisdom and the living shadow of reality, similar to Keats's comparison of the imagination

with Adam's dream: "he awoke and found it truth."<sup>1</sup>

The effect of an exploration of Henry's inner life in dreams gives the Songs a near massive emotional, rather than reasoned directness. The fertile layers and folds of the Songs thrive in Henry's anxiety so that to observe Henry's dreams is to observe, seemingly, madness. In "an extraordinary vivid dream," Henry dreams that "his mother's estate/was on the grounds of a lunatic asylum" where the inmates "never leave their cells";<sup>2</sup> Henry does not attempt to

go into the meaning of the dream  
except to say a sense of total LOSS  
afflicted me....

(V, 101)

In this context of course "sense" means "feeling," but in the progress of the Songs feeling crystallizes into a logical inevitability: Henry serves painfully his "blind term" (III, 63) in the dark cell of his dreams; he is "rid slowly of all his dreams" (VI, 178); and he wakes and blunders on, "wiser, on the whole,/but not more accurate" (VI, 263).

As The Dream Songs unfolds, we gradually survey the types and the boundaries of dreams. Henry's Songs include not only the unconscious dream (the dreamer is unaware that he is dreaming), but also lucid dreams (the dreamer is aware that he is dreaming). And Henry's dreams suggest meanings other than dreams of the mind: he dreams in the sense of a vision of the ideal: "I saw in my dream/the great lost cities, Macchu Picchu, Cambridge Mass., Angkor..." (VI, 197); and he sees in his dreams an aspiration to something notable:

In the night-reaches dreamed he of better graces,  
of liberations, and beloved faces,  
such as now ere he sings.

(IV, 90)

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1. Forman, ed., Letters, p.68.

2. Berryman believed strongly in the "vision" of madness: "I think that Whitman is right with regard to 'Song of Myself.' I am prepared to submit to his opinion. He was crazy, and I don't contradict madmen. When William Blake says something, I say thank you, even though he has uttered the most hopeless fallacy that you can imagine. I'm willing to be their loving audience. I'm just hoping to hear something marvelous from time to time, marvelous and true." Stitt, "The Art of Poetry: An Interview with John Berryman." p.192.

But he is concerned mainly with dreams of the mind. He sees dreams as puzzling: "I don't understand this dream..." (V, 137). He wrestles with fear and uncertainty in dreams: "Dreams make crawl with fear..." (II, 49) and "All we dream, uncertain..." (V, 109). His dreams become a means of determining the actual and confronting the ordinary:

Rid slowly of all his dreams  
he faced the wicked ordinary day  
in a tumult of seems

whilst wanderers on coasts lookt for the man  
actual, having encountered all his ghosts  
off & on, by the way.

(VI, 178)

At the center of these types and boundaries of dreams rest some important assumptions. First, Henry, helpless in sleep, will allow his subconscious to speak the truth, even though the truth might be disguised. While Henry himself might fantasize, the reader should not regard his dreams as fantasies in the pejorative sense. And second, because he is helpless in sleep, the journey into his interior regions is both a passive and an active pursuit. His subconscious acts as his radar: "My radar digs. I do not dig" (I, 21). Perplexed and stymied by the outer world, his subconsciousness helps him overcome his difficulties even when he has outwardly abandoned them as insurmountable.

Perhaps it is predictable that poetry (i.e. Song) and dreams should be fused together, for dreams have in common with poetry many of the same properties. Condensation makes for the poet's tropes of synecdoche and metonymy; displacement is his allusion; and transformation of thoughts into visual images is his metaphor. Long before Berryman began his Dream Songs in the late 1950's, he was obviously attracted to the idea of making a poem about dreams, and he recognized the similarity of condensation in dreams and poetry as in "Desire Is a World by Night" (about 1940): "When we dream, paraphrase, analysis/Exhaust the crannies of the night" (T.D., p.53). In

his study of Stephen Crane (1950) he praises Robert Graves's theory of dreams that points to the origin of poetry:

A savage dreams, is frightened by...[his] dream, and goes to the medicine man to have it explained. The medicine man can make up anything, anything will reassure the savage, so long as the manner of its delivery is impressive; so he chants, perhaps he stamps his foot, people like rhythm, what he says becomes rhythmical, people like to hear things again, and what he says begins to rhyme. Poetry begins -- as a practical matter, for use. It reassures the savage. Perhaps he only hears back again, chanted, the dream he just told the medicine man, but he is reassured; it is like a spell. And medicine men are shrewd: interpretation enters the chanting, symbols are developed and connected, the gods are invoked, poetry booms. 1

And so do Berryman's Dream Songs boom; when Henry's friend asks, "Has you seen a medicine man?" (VII, 366) the medicine man chants, stamps his foot and "what he says begins to rhyme." In Graves's theory we observe an early seed for The Dream Songs; the repetition of the same theme or experience in poetry to clarify a deep-seated problem, a medley of symbols being developed and connected ("something seen naively in a new relation"),<sup>2</sup> and the possibility of interpreting dreams. Henry's dreams, in fact, might be regarded as archetypal in that his recurrent struggles are primordial: guilt for desiring to murder his father; his need to overcome his sexual instinct; and his need for self-sacrifice. In this sense, The Dream Songs records a discovery, by means of repetition to solidify the layers, of Henry's primordial self.

Elsewhere in his critical biography of Stephen Crane, Berryman notes that as a practical matter a poem may merely "rehearse" a dream: "the poem can simply say what the dream (nightmare) was...."<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, The Dream Songs has a quality of investigation like that "inimitable sincerity of a frightened savage anxious to learn what his dream means,"<sup>4</sup> which Berryman found in Crane's poetry. On the one hand Henry says that he has a "special need" to "rest & rehearse" (VI, 179), but on the other he needs rhymes "to signal his fiery Passage" (IV, 79). A single poem might rehearse a dream,

1. Berryman, Stephen Crane, p.273.

2. Ibid., p.277.

3. Ibid., p.287.

4. Ibid., p.277.

but 385 of them become an investigation; their art might be an artifice of rehearsal, but taken as a whole, they have the qualities of inspired intuition and reasoned significance.

II. iv. The Dramatis Personae of Dreams

"The impersonator is our special joy/And puzzle...."

The Dispossessed, p.59.

The poem as a "rehearsal" and an "investigation" brings to bear upon drama, a strategem in dreams that reveals, ironically, the dreamer. While the primordial in Henry is suggested in his pretence of a black mask, by extension, the mask suggests the primitive framework of visual emblems in dreams. Dreams are a form of primitive thinking; they bluntly manifest in concrete emblems and analogies and not in abstract thoughts. Dreams, as in primitive thought, cannot relate cause and effect but remain on the plane of the senses, especially the visual sense. Thus, anger in our dreams may be represented by an angry person; our sexuality may be acted out in the figure of a sexy woman; our self-esteem may be elevated in the figure of a general on a white horse; overcoming a crisis may be emblemized in crossing a river. People and objects in dreams become dramatis personae and emblems representing, as they may do on the stage, certain ideas and feelings: "mimics we wish we all were, and are" (T.D., p.60). To simplify further, a dream might be called a dramatic allegory in which the characteristics and experiences we ourselves possess are represented by people or objects. Each represents, and oftentimes plays out, the parts we assign them as we unconsciously write the script. The players and emblems may call attention to themselves or hover in a marginal fog; they may simply manifest our feelings or attempt to resolve our conflicts.

In our dreams all of us seem to be a kind of J. Alfred Prufrock in preparing "a face to meet the faces that you meet." There is an aspect of our personality that is formed by and adapted to the social environment. The figures of the persona in our dreams, as C.G. Jung called these masks of our social awareness, dramatizes the conflict between our real self and what we would wish to hide from others:

Since we live in a social world, and yet have undesirable traits in our characters which we are unwilling to show to others, we have to put on a mask to hide our real selves, a mask of bravado to hide our fear, of indifference to hide from others how much we feel, a mask of politeness to disguise our hate or contempt. 1

To take the first of these examples, Henry feigns for the public a mask of bravado as a knight. He persists in his disguise even when someone knows of his counterfeit; almost mockingly Henry's friend addresses him as "Sir Bones," knight of the burnt-cork (i.e. a black-faced minstrel). Alone, Henry's conscience forces him to be honest about his knighthood: "Henry was not a coward. Much" (I, 13). His honesty, however, does not prevent from craving the "heroic stuff" of knighthood; he wonders, "of what heroic stuff was warlock Henry made?" (IV, 79). "Warlock" denotes Henry's desire even for sorcery to be transformed into a knight; it connotes as well, the "war like" heroism that he craves. His need for knighthood persists:

I do this, thrice a year; that is, I grope  
a few sore hours among my actuals  
for evidence of knighthood.

(VI, 163)

The mask of bravado that Henry wishes to put on in public, though he cannot do so privately, becomes recast as actual evidence of his bravery. Near the end of The Dream Songs Henry finds the courage of knighthood; he becomes "Sir Henry" (no longer the devious and ironic "Sir Bones," knight of the burnt-cork) combating and defeating the dragon lust who has defeated him for so long:

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1. Hadfield, Dreams and Nightmares, p.43. This dramatization is of course similar to Freud's theory of disguised wish fulfilment.

My lady is all in green, for innocence  
 I am in black, a terror to my foes  
 who are numerous & strong.  
 I haven't lost a battle yet but I am tense  
 for the first losing. I wipe blood from my nose  
 and raise my voice in song.

(VII, 315)

Blow upon blow, his fire-breath hurt me sore,  
 I upped my broad sword & it hurt him more,  
 without his talons at a loss  
 & dragons are stupid: I wheeled around to the back of him  
 my charger swift and then I trimmed him  
 tail-less.

(VII, 316)

Henry's mask of a knight is but one of his numerous disguises:  
 among his occupations are teacher, poet, actor, doctor, archaeologist, athlete,  
 rabbi, soldier, sailor, and statesman; he has various names, Henry House,  
 Henry Hankovitch, and Henry Pussy-Cat; he becomes various animals, a cat, a  
 rabbit, a racoon, a deer, a "monstrous bug," and a bat. The multiplicity  
 of these masks suggests at once a complex and fragmented personality. At  
 times his masks represent his desire to hide his undesirable traits, but  
 they may portray Henry's true feelings. His mask of a hunted deer, innocent,  
 more sinned against than sinning, discloses Henry's own feelings of anxiety,  
 helplessness, and persecution:

I lay my ears back. I am about to die.  
 My cleft feet drum.  
 Pierce, the two-footers club. My green world pipes  
 a finish -- for us all, my love, not some.

(III, 56)

Another mask might suggest a more confident Henry; often he dreams that he  
 is a cat, which seems logical, for cunning, surviving Henry seems to have  
 nine lives.<sup>1</sup>

At times Henry seems to be aware that he hides behind masks: "Is  
 it the hour to replace my face?" (VI, 243) he asks; and again, mockingly,

1. There might be something in Henry's feeling that as a poet he, like Yeats, would become "King of the Cats." In his essay on Pound, Berryman recalled that "Pound went to London in 1908, at twenty-three, to learn from Yeats how to write poetry, in the belief that no one living knew more about it. Swinburne was just alive (when he died the following April, 'I am the King of the Cats,' said Yeats to one of his sisters meeting her in the street)...." Berryman, "The Poetry of Ezra Pound," p.378.

"I think the elder statesman stance will do" (VI, 212). But he is also aware that assuming a mask might protect him from temptations -- for example, vanity and greed:

Henry reacted like a snake to praise,  
 he shed his skin  
 appearing thenceforward in a new guise  
 so praise was for his past, he not therein,  
 saving from vanity, the mirror's eyes,  
 saving him from greed.

(VII, 287)

He is aware, too, that masks do not always protect him; his mask of bravado as knight falls away with the weakness of the flesh:

How tiresome Spenser's knights, their grave wounds overnight  
 annealed, whilst Henry with one broken arm  
 deep in hospital lay  
 with real pain....

(VI, 198)

But clever Henry, more aware than he knows, benefits from the paradoxical truth of the mask: "Naked the man came forth in his mask, to be" (VII, 370). A mask allows Henry to be both something he is and something he is not, as in his mask of bravado as knight; as his dreams unfold, his masks play out views of himself that allow him "to be." The mask might be viewed as a bandage that aids in healing the wound. Just as a kind of amnesia may block the unconscious because of some deep psychic wound so the mask may shield the unconscious and allow it time to heal. Henry's unconscious was deeply wounded at age twelve when his father committed suicide. Now, at about age forty-eight, he realizes just how important masks have been to him; they have allowed him time to heal and in a sense to be reborn:

Womb was the word, where Henry never developed.  
 Prudent of him, though gloomy. I assume  
 that which you neglect.  
 The face he put on matters, slightly wrecked,  
 passed muster O at noon & while he supped  
 & enroute back to the womb.

(VI, 270)

The face his unconscious puts on matters because it allows Henry to become strong enough and to be less encumbered as he digs into the layers of his past and attempts to make them solid. In Henry's baby-talk, he betrays his "adolescent imagination," but then the "adolescent imagination" does not dominate for very long: Henry does return from all of his "dying," "adult & difficult" (IV, 87).

Through Henry's masks we may determine not only his personal history but also his identification with and relation to the American past. His Negro minstrel mask is an obvious representation. The minstrel mask calls up the uniquely American phenomenon of a white man pretending to be a black man.<sup>1</sup> This tradition began in the 1820's with Daddy Rice and extended even to the 1930's in Amos 'n' Andy on the radio. Berryman invokes this tradition of Negro minstrelsy in the first epigraph of 77 Dream Songs: "Go in, brack man, de day's yo' own" was Carl Wittke's epigraph too in his study of minstrelsy Tambo and Bones (1930). Song 2, entitled "Big Buttons, Coronets: the advance," is dedicated to the founder of Negro minstrelsy, "Daddy Rice who sang and jumped 'Jim Crow' in Louisville in 1828 (London 1836 and later)...." From the outset of his dreams Henry associates himself with, and in fact pretends to be, a Negro minstrel, the clowning end man in his colorful, dilapidated costume who honors the "burnt-cork," and who will sing and jump in America and Ireland. He and his friend, who calls Henry Mr. Bones but remains nameless himself, banter on stage like Tambo and Bones or Amos 'n' Andy:

-Are you radioactive, pal?    -Pal, radioactive.  
 -Has you the night sweats & the day sweats, pal?  
 -Pal, I do.  
 -Did your gal leave you?    -What do you think, pal?

(II, 51)

The exchanges between Henry and his friend are dramatized in Negro idiom which sometimes slides into the double meaning of the wit of dreams; when

1. As Richard Wright has said, "Negro life is all life lifted to the heights of pain and pathos, drama and tragedy. The history of the Negro in America is the history of Western Man writ Small.... The Negro is America's metaphor." White Man, Listen! (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1957), pp.108-9.

Henry says that by being alone we "cry oursel's awake" (II, 40), he means literally "cry ourselves awake," but he is saying also that alone, "we cry our cells awake."

What seems to start as dreams of minstrel entertainment in the manner of Daddy Rice jumping and singing develops into a serious pursuit of historical authority. Henry's relation to the American past of Negro minstrelsy which developed from slaves comically imitating their masters reflects Henry's own ingenuity and resiliency in bondage:

He sings  
& clowns  
and is wiser than the next man....

(VII, 357)

Henry in black face "advances," as the title of Song 2 indicates he will, through his ability to survive. Whether the black slave found as much joy as Henry does in surviving seems doubtful, but he may emblemize, as he does for Henry, strength through suffering. In fact, Berryman emphasized this point in an interview:

The Negro is an expert in survival. He is familiar with death and yet somehow continually picks himself off the very floor, clambers out of the very basement of civilization. Supremely a victim, he escapes self-pity through joy in survival. 1

This is more than the authority of history, it is a legacy of hope.

## II. v. Freud, Our Pedagogue of Dreams

Freud, Henry dreams in a later Song, is "our pedagogue to whip us into truth" (VII, 327). He disagrees with Freud on the limitations of dreams and broadens their scope to a "panorama of the whole mental life":

Freud was some wrong about dreams, or almost all;  
besides his insights grand, he thought that dreams were  
a transcript  
of childhood & the day before,  
censored of course: a transcript....

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1. Howard, "Whiskey and Ink, Whiskey and Ink," p.72.

....  
 I tell you, Sir, you have enlightened but  
 you have misled us: a dream is a panorama  
 of the whole mental life,  
 I took one once to forty-three structures, that  
 accounted in each for each word: I did not yell "mama"  
 nor did I take it out on my wife.

(VII, 327)

Despite this objection to Freud's limiting scope of dreams, many of his observations are woven into the fabric of Henry's dream-work, especially dream-censorship, the wit of language, symbols, and the unity of opposites.

The distortions and gaps posited by Freud in his theory of dream-censorship (i.e. the "omission, modification, regrouping of material"<sup>1</sup>) visibly direct Henry's dreams. According to Freud, in our conscious life we repress or censor feelings which, nevertheless, overlap into our unconscious life. In dreams, however, censorship is overcome because the dreamer chooses, in spite of himself, ideas related to that which he would repress. In this sense, dreams progress from a disguised wish-fulfilment of feelings to an undisguised wish-fulfilment. Thus, by observing the rhythms of Henry's dreams we slowly learn what Henry normally censors. For example, Henry's loss of his father is a loss that he wishes to repress, but cannot in his dreams. Henry's desire to forget the memory of his loss manifests itself in the related idea of murder; Henry desires, in other words, to "kill" his loss. Early in The Dream Songs Henry looks in a mirror: "Gentle friendly Henry Pussy-Cat/smiled into his mirror, a murderer's..." (I, 19). He sees himself as a murderer, but he does not know why. He dreams of having committed a violent murder, but concludes:

... never did Henry, as he thought he did,  
 end anyone and hacks her body up  
 and hide the pieces, where they may be found.

(II, 29)

In identifying with Cain, Henry sees himself as a marked murderer: "consider me/in my cast, your first son" (II, 42). Henry's friend asks about what

1. Sigmund Freud, Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis, revised edition, trans. by Joan Riviere (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1929), p.117; see also p.189.

appears to be the mark of Cain: "Is that thing on the front of your head what it seems to be, pal?" (II, 51). Even Henry's view of history and of his surroundings reflects his own obsession with murder: he dreams of Stalin's massacres -- "Brother Josef came with his fiend's heart" (III, 59); and of war -- "The war is real, /... incident to murder" (III, 61). Recurring dreams of violent and senseless murders disturb Henry: a murdered couple in a parked car -- "her throat is slit so deep the backbone eddies..." (VI, 237); Richard Speck who murdered eight nurses in Chicago; and Charles Whitman in Houston, Texas who murdered his wife and mother and then locked himself in a tower and killed thirteen more people and wounded thirty-three (V, 135). Apart from Henry's humane concern over these murders, these dreams are evidence of his anxiety over his desire to "kill" the loss of his father, but, finally, Henry dreams that he and his father meet at midday "in a clearing and lookt at each other a while. / To kill was not the message" (V, 116).

Freud might call Henry's overcoming his desire to kill his father a normal triumph over the Oedipus complex at the age of puberty when the aggressive impulses of a boy towards his father are subdued. Up to this stage the boy has identified with his mother more than his father, but now he identifies more with his father. Henry's father, however, committed suicide when Henry was twelve, about the age of puberty; so, for most of his life -- up to the period of The Dream Songs when he ages from forty-one to fifty-one -- one might conjecture that he has been left in the pubescent state of desiring to kill his father. His father had done his Oedipal act for him. His father's death is one of the reasons for Henry's "oceanic feeling," as Freud says: "I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father's protection. Thus the part played by the oceanic feeling, which might seek something like the restoration of of limitless narcissism, is ousted from a place in the foreground."<sup>1</sup> As

1. Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, trans. Joan Riviere, rev. and newly ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1972), p.9.

Berryman said of Stephen Crane, whose father committed suicide, Crane's unconscious aggression towards his father was caused by his "sense of desertion and impoverishment (with consequent resentments) arising from his [Father's] death."<sup>1</sup> As Henry matures, he realizes that he does not wish to kill his father, but rather, to kill the bad start, the bad example his father set for him:

Mercy! my father; do not pull the trigger  
or all my life I'll suffer from your anger  
killing what you began.

(VI, 235)

In the terrifying penultimate poem of The Dream Songs, Henry returns to the grave of his father. He yearns to dig down into the grave and

tear apart  
the mouldering grave clothes he & then Henry  
will heft the ax once more, his final card,  
and fell it on the start.

(VII, 384)

In dreaming of murders and murdering Henry has chosen a related idea which leads him to what he would wish to do, to obliterate his bad start in life.

Related to dream-censorship, in that dreams give us a condensed version of the unconscious, is the wit of language in dreams. Freud's theory of the wit of dreams means basically that words undergo "unconscious elaboration."<sup>2</sup> This elaboration is a form of the dreamer's overcoming the censorship of his dreams because the elaboration is related to that which has been repressed. The ambiguity of words and the multiplicity of thought relations appear in the form of a witticism which allows words to mean something other than what they say or to have several meanings at once.

An extended example will perhaps explain the fullness and complexity of this economy of language and at the same time show the inevitable logic

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1. Berryman, Stephen Crane, p.314.
  2. Freud, Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis, pp.199-200.

of the wit in Henry's dreams. The first Song offers a good base on which to build; it is the logical place to start, too, for like the opening scene of a play, the first scene of a dream usually points to how the rest of the dream (or in this case dreams) might be viewed. By tracing two words, "pried" and "bear,"<sup>1</sup> we learn more about Henry in his unconscious elaborations:

I don't see how Henry, pried  
open for all the world to see, survived.

What he has now to say is a long  
wonder the world can bear & be.  
/my italics/

(I, 1)

In this context, "pried" denotes simply being opened as by a lever. (There is, however, a suggestion of Henry's "pride" being "open for all the world to see.") "Bear" has a number of denotations: 1) difficult or impossible to support or hold up, 2) to endure, 3) to give birth to, 4) to hold in mind, 5) to accept or acknowledge. These same words (except that "bear" is now "grizzly") appear in Song 34:

One man, wide  
in the mind, and tendoned like a grizzly, pried  
to his trigger-digit, pal.

(II, 34)

Henry's memory of watching his father shoot himself is a source of Henry's being pried open. His associations of his father's "trigger-digit" prying the trigger, and his father being "pried" to the point of committing suicide, provide another connecting fold in Henry's being "pried open to all the world." The bear in Song 34 represents Henry's father; thus all of the layers of meaning of "bear" in Song 1 and Song 34 logically come together: Henry finds the memory of his father's suicide difficult to support; he must, however, endure it, hold it in mind, and accept it so that he gives birth

1. It should be noted that Patricia Ann Brenner uses the example of the bear in Henry's dreams in her unpublished Ph.D. dissertation John Berryman's Dream Songs: Manner and Matter, Kent State University, 1970. I arrived at my own example independently, though some of our points do dovetail.

to a fullness and wholeness of himself. In Song 36 Henry alludes to William Faulkner's short story "The Bear":

The boy & the bear  
looked at each other.

(II, 36)

Henry's identification with Ike McCaslin in "The Bear" is logical; just as Ike faces the bear and the past, so must Henry face the bear of his father and the past.

After being "pried open for all to see," Henry struggles to close himself again. He does so by reshaping "pried" into "pride":

Up all we rose with dawn, springy for pride,  
trying all morning.

(VI, 223)

My love & pride  
fixed me like a safety-pin.

(VII, 316)

Henry cannot help being pried open, but in finding his pride, the lever releases him. The association between his father's death causing him to be "pried" and his own "pride" is made explicit near the end of The Dream Songs:

Henry's pride in his house was almost fierce,  
Henry, who took no pride in anything  
only but work hard done:  
an angry ghost appeared & leaned for years  
on his front stoop....

(VII, 357)

The "angry ghost" of his father, who has pried him open, no longer affects Henry's pride in his own home.

The noun and verb "bear" slide into a number of layers of meanings; I have mentioned several but there are others. Just as he sees his father as a formidable bear so he sees lust, another of his adversaries, as a bear. When Henry is tempted to be unfaithful to his wife, he sees his temptress as

"cold & golden... in a wilderness of bears" (VII, 291, 302, 372). When Henry uses the verb "to bear," he often uses it with the multiplicity of meaning that I suggested for Song 1 (my italics throughout):

Henry hates the world. What the world to Henry  
did will not bear thought.

(III, 74)

With shining strides hear his redeemer come,  
in a hospital gown, bringing to bear on some  
more than they will can bear.

(VI, 202)

My desire for death was strong  
but never strong enough. I thought: this is my chance,  
I can bear it.

(VI, 259)

You couldn't bear to grow old, but we grow old.

(VI, 263)

With fried excitement he looked across at life  
wondering if he could bear it more....

(VII, 356)

If we were to pursue these passages, inevitably each would lead to major themes of The Dream Songs -- Henry's ability to survive, and his acceptance of loss, of life, of death and of his surroundings -- and enfold into the multiplicity of words and meaning in the panorama of his dreams.

Words redefined over long distances of time and space help to structure The Dream Songs rhythmically, but the wit of language does not demand repetition: elaboration of a word may suggest multiple layers in its context alone. For example, Henry, who is being buried, asks "whence flew the litter where he [Henry] was laid"? (IV, 79). "Litter" appears *very infrequently* in the Songs, and Berryman <sup>here</sup> makes the most of it. In the context of the poem, "litter" probably means a stretcher on which dying Henry is carried. But since Henry is being buried, "litter" may mean a burial bed and the decayed layer of organic matter where he is buried. And, too, "litter" denotes the debris, rubbish, and scattered

disorder upon which Henry has rested for so long. ("Laid" is also slang for sexual intercourse: Henry's being "laid" so often is part of the reason for his sense of disorder.) Paradoxically, though "litter" strongly denotes debris and death, it means to give birth to as well, a denotation that suggests that through death Henry will be reborn, which the rest of the Songs confirm.

Occasionally the wit of Henry's dream language is evident in a word which is broken up and reshaped into several words: thus "the vacant spiritual of space" (V, 113) squeezes from one word two different words; or "find me a sur-vivid fool" (VI, 245) makes for a wry humor. In the same way an uncommon or unlikely prefix will be set to a word and weave together new threads of meaning. When Henry says he is "undead" (VI, 177) he means that he is not dead and that he is deprived of death; or when he calls the world a "dis-world" (II, 41) he means in Negro idiom "this" world, in the Latin sense of two worlds, and as a prefix, an opposite world, a deprived world, an excluded world, a negative world, and a world completely world.

Another aspect of Henry's wit of language is his use of archaisms which appear primarily in the first three Parts and suggest a primordial authority asserting itself in adolescent Henry. While some readers might find them annoying, they do serve to connect several historical layers of meaning. "Whilom," an archaic adjective meaning "former," conveys in the following context both its literal meaning and calls up an aura of the primordial:

Ol' Marster, being bound you do your best  
 versus we coons, spare now a cagey John  
 a whilom bits that whip:  
 who'll tell your fortune, when you have confessed  
 whose & whose woundings -- against the innocent stars  
 & remorseless seas....

(II, 51)

The same levels of meaning are conveyed in the archaic adjective "agone"

which means "ago": lamenting his father's suicide Henry feels that his father purposely left him to struggle alone -- his father "dared so long agone leave..." (III, 76). The archaism "agone" emphasizes the deep injury to Henry which may be explained in archetypal terms.

Though tracing word elaborations may tell us much about the dream-work, a lot of *floatsam* and *jetsam* remain unaccounted for. Some of this debris, or "silent elements" to use Freud's suggestive but hedging figure of speech, may be translated by an outside observer. But it is a slippery business; Freud admitted that symbolism was "the most remarkable part"<sup>1</sup> of his theory of dreams, and certainly the limits of symbolism are difficult to assign because the dreamer has "at his command a symbolic mode of expression of which he knows nothing, and does not even recognize, in his working life."<sup>2</sup> But there can be little doubt that the rhythm of symbols belongs to Henry's dream-work; a few of the more obvious symbols in Henry's dreams will sharpen and illustrate the point.

Setting out on a journey has traditionally represented a development, or growth and education of the journeyer. In Henry's dreams we witness his slow growth as he journeys from place to place over a period of some eleven years. Fearful and uncertain, wanting someone to map his way ("Come & diminish me, & map my way [I, 137]"), he sets out again and again until a refreshing and maturing power takes hold and guides him. According to Freud, setting out on a journey may represent dying, which comments on Henry's journey, for he is a journeyer "deaf in the mould" and "insane/with violent travel & death" (II, 42). Freud notes further that these dreams of departing on a journey "say in a consoling way: 'Don't worry, you won't die (depart)'...."<sup>3</sup> This is partly true of Henry's

1. *Ibid.*, 126.

2. *Ibid.*, p.139.

3. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. and ed. by James Strachey (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1954), p.385.

dreams: on the one hand he wishes not to die but on the other he longs for death. The demands of these opposite wishes are resolved in the idea of death as necessary for new life; in dying he books "a passage to a greener scene" where his soul has been "earning" (VI, 274).

Related to the journey in the sense of freeing oneself from bondage is flying, a symbol in dreams, Freud notes, that is individual in character and requires "the most various interpretations."<sup>1</sup> For one person flying may symbolize a desire to be free like a bird; for another a desire to be like an angel. For Henry flying is associated with that which aids him to freedom: "Love has wings & flies" (VII, 359) and again, quite differently, but equally important to him, buying his own books is like having "extra wings" (VII, 364). But his wings may signify straightforwardly an escape from bondage, as from his intolerable memory of his father's suicide:

an angry ghost appeared & leaned for years  
on his front stoop; elderly Henry spread his wings  
one by one

until the traffic could not see it more....

(VII, 357)

Freud supported the theory that flying dreams may signify an erection. Berryman seems to rely on this theory in portraying Henry's great craving for sex. A dream of flying, "Henry sats in de plane & was gay" (I, 5), follows a dream in which Henry "hungers" after a female's "delicious body" (I, 4). A more conclusive example comes several Songs later when Henry dreams that he was

so beastly in love for Charlotte Coquet  
he skated up & down in front of her house  
wishing he could, sir, die,  
while being bullied & he dreamt he could fly....

(I, 11)

Similar in idea, if not in kind, to the dream symbol of flying as an escape is the symbol of ears representing understanding. In some Songs,

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1. Ibid., p.394.

especially the earlier ones, Henry blames society ("they") for weakening his eyes and putting "burning thumbs in his ears" (I, 8); in others he attributes to man's condition his inability to understand -- "Man palms his ears and moans" (II, 41). When Henry's understanding is stymied, his ears hurt (IV, 81, 89, and V, 128). He is compelled, nevertheless, to "play it by ear/out there until all's straight" (VI, 278). Under the stress of being compelled, he grieves that he, and all of us, will never be cured of "ear aches" because "all we know is ears" (V, 97). We must, in other words, trust our understanding, even though our understanding will never be complete. The last time ears are mentioned in Henry's dreams, he despairs of complete understanding: he clasps "both hands to both ears" and resigns "from the ranks of giving men" (VII, 356). But his despair over incomplete understanding does not defeat him; in the next Song Henry does find pride in his home and "work hard done," he does belong to the "ranks of giving men" for he is "deep in extra love" (VII, 357). "The poet" Berryman said of Pound, "has listened to his life, so to speak, and he tells us that which he hears."<sup>1</sup>

One might continue illustrating symbols in Henry's dreams, and Freud's application of symbols in particular: "castration anxiety" represented in having teeth extracted:

They took away his teeth,  
white & helpful....

....  
They took away his crotch.

(I, 8)

or the "Cain phantasy" ("consider me/in my cast your first son" [II, 42]) of being both a brother to all men and a murderer. But the point, I hope, is clear: when we determine what the dream symbols mean to Henry and then trace these symbols across distances, we begin to find ourselves in a rhythm

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1. Berryman, "The Poetry of Ezra Pound," p. 389.

of Henry's dream-work and nearer a full understanding of him.

Perhaps it has been apparent in my discussion of symbolism that all manner of contradictions seem to coexist in one symbol. (My discussion here is <sup>of</sup> Freud's influence; it should be remembered, nevertheless, that for the Romantics, Coleridge in particular, the symbol reconciled opposite or discordant qualities, ideas and feelings.) In dreams this is more than coexistence, it is a unification, though not a resolution, of contradictory ideas and feelings that provides real power to Henry's fragmented soul and a solid base for understanding The Dream Songs. This principle of the unification of opposites was an important part of Freud's theory of dreams; given his view of dreams as structures, his discovery of this principle would seem inevitable:

Many experiences... lead me to assert that the dream-work is under some kind of necessity to combine all sources which have acted as stimuli for the dream into a single unity in the dream itself. 1

Like the philosophical egg of medieval alchemy in which opposite elements were enclosed, heated, and fused together; dreams enclose, heat, and fuse together Henry's "hateful seige of contraries" Dreams enable him to bring together within boundaries the long sundered opposites of heaven and hell, spirit and flesh, good and evil, man and woman; or to use different terms, dreams bring about the knowledge and acceptance of the paradox (like Keats's idea of "Negative Capability") in the human condition. Flopped into chaos, Henry at first ignores as much as he can about him; he suffers from an inability to pull together the pieces of contradiction:

I am -- I should be held together by --  
but I am breaking up  
and Henry now has come full stop....

(IV, 85)

As Henry takes up "Is-ness" (VI, 229), he longs for some middle ground between opposites; in fact, The Dream Songs end on that note:

If there were a middle ground between things and the soul  
or if the sky resembled more the sea,  
I wouldn't have to scold

my heavy daughter. (VII, 385)

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1. Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, p.179.

Significantly, "if" qualifies Henry's experience of his long journey in dreams; while he has found no middle ground he did find something in which he could enclose opposites as the first three lines of that last verse indicate:

My house is made of wood and it's made well,  
unlike us. My house is older than Henry;  
that's fairly old.

(VII, 385)

Henry has hoped for and found a bringing together in his house of dreams, in his house of a family, in the house of himself, and in the house of his long poem. His agony has given birth to his "heavy" but whole daughter.

But to begin with the effect of the unification of opposites on Henry is to leap ahead without clarifying the phenomenon itself. Freud suggests that in dreams

contraries are treated in just the same way as similarities, with a marked preference for expression by means of the same manifest element. An element in the manifest dream which admits an opposite may stand simply for itself, or for its opposite, or for both together.... 1

Henry's mask of the Negro minstrel, for example, brings together the opposites of joy and suffering. "Cave," and similarly, "hole," offers a more fixed visual example of an element which may stand simply for itself or for its opposite. One view of the cave is negative -- a place of darkness, fragmentation, and fear, like Blake's use of the Platonic symbol of the body in which man is confined: "For man has closed himself up till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks in his cavern."<sup>2</sup> Behind his Negro mask Henry feels left in the dark and shoved into a hole, "I votes in my hole" (I, 2) he grumbles; Henry feels fragmented in his dungeon-like entrance to the underworld; "it's broken down here" (II, 34), he grieves; and he creeps into the fearful arctic cave where his Father, "the biggest bear" (V, 120), sleeps. But Henry is not swallowed up in the cave of his anxiety; a positive view emerges. Instead of feeling shoved into a dark hole, he finds his cave a

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1. Freud, Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis, p.150.

2. Blake, Complete Writings, p.154.

retreat of enlightenment, "an eventful thought came" to him as he squirmed in his hole (IV, 85); instead of a place of fragmentation, he can see that it might be a place of wholeness as in Dante and Rimbaud who "each dug down for himself a definite hole" (VII, 348); and instead of a place of paralyzing fear, he finds it to be a place where he must make peace with the bear-like ghost of his father as Henry creeps to the cave with sugar in his hand (V, 120).

The cave, however, does not seem to stand for two things at once. Like the prisoners who are awakened to a knowledge of reality in Plato's "Cave of Illusion" (after a man's theoretical education something else is needed; he must pass down from the heights of philosophy into the "cave" of the world), Henry has to struggle up through the darkness to the mouth of the cave of reality with the assurance that a house will be a construct for him, a shelter of opposites. "Cave-man Henry" says to his wife, "It's cold in here. I'd rather have a house./A house would be better..." (VII, 381). The riddle of the house's emblematic meaning has no simple single answer: "Henry's house has many rooms" (VII, 319), like Keats's notion of comparing the "human life" with a "Large Mansion of Many Apartments...."<sup>1</sup> but the house-  
 emblem does bring together opposites and shows an acceptance of them. Freud notes that the house symbol is "the only typical..., regularly occurring, representation of the human form as a whole...."<sup>2</sup> Henry's dreams echo this representation: one of Henry's names is Henry House (I, 12 and 17); upon the death of Robert Frost, troubled Henry laments: "Our roof is lefted off" (II, 39); and a despairing cry of the spirit is expressed as a body-house: "We are using our own skins as wallpaper..." (III, 53). This symbol of the body as a house suggests the vitality and the complexity that a human body houses; it might also suggest, as Freud says, the dwelling house "as a substitute for the mother's womb, the first lodging, for which in all likelihood man still longs, and in which he was safe and felt at ease."<sup>3</sup> In

1. Forman, ed. Letters, p.143.

2. Freud, Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis, p.128.

3. Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, p.28.

short, a house suggests a unification, though not a resolve, of contraries within Henry's body-house -- Henry's heart and brain give him "commands from upstairs and downstairs" (IV, 78). The symbol of the house as a home of human relationships and the residence of a family unit exemplifies the paradoxical nature of all that it shelters: the respectable (VI, 163) and the laughable (VII, 336); a myriad place (VII, 319) and a place of security (VII, 381); a place where one misses an absent family (VI, 189) and a place where one feels alone with family about (VI, 260); a place of hopelessness (IV, 89) and a place of hope (VI, 243); a place of death (VI, 191) and a place of refuge from death (VI, 265). While the emblem of the house does not represent a logical fusion of contraries, it does construct an ancient symbol of a complete structure in which Henry has a sense of unification and which, in turn, ministers to his sundered soul. Henry's house might be "made of wood" but it's "made well" and is "older than Henry" (VII, 385).<sup>1</sup>

I would hope that looking at dreams locates some of the vitality and complexity of living, and shows some of life that the human imagination may transform into poetry and back into life. For every angle in the structure there is the pulse of blood. Though the Songs seem to stretch as long as Henry lives to put them down, they illuminate, in their development, universal and infinite possibilities of the human condition. In these possibilities, rhythms, folds, and layers construct themselves in an ever-becoming but finally whole Henry. Like Stendhal who did not claim to write history but who quite simply noted down his memories "to guess what sort of man I have been," we learn what sort of man Henry has been in the poetry of his dreams.

It would seem that Berryman anticipated what Adrian Stokes urged in his essay "Psycho-analysis and Our Culture," which, incidentally, nearly

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1. In broader terms, J. Preston Cole, quoting Martin Buber, has suggested that man must know himself in order to overcome his "cosmic homelessness": "No new house in the universe is being planned for man, but he, as a builder of houses, is being required to know himself." The Problematic Self in Kirkegaard and Freud (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), p.1.

reads like a gloss on The Dream Songs. He argued, among other things, that a "deeper acceptance" of "inner hierarchies," made more explicit in psycho-analysis,

alone can restore to art the exuberance of structural animation, intensified at a vital point, since outer forms will primarily reflect, not a ready-made projection, religion for instance, but the inner forms conceived to be inner that from this their nature lend themselves to revised myth. 1

While this statement does exaggerate because both myth and religion do lean heavily on "inner hierarchies," Stokes touches the pulse of an important observation, the necessity for our scientific age to revise, and indeed have, myth which embodies the truths of a culture, in this case America, and universal truths. Each race and age has had its own body of myth, but given our perspective of history and science, it seems impossible that we could create and believe in a new myth; indeed such a venture would likely end nearer fantasy than truth. But our need to make concrete the human spirit and to place man in the cosmos persists. To start at the primary source, inner man, seems to be the logical place to create, or recreate, myth and make it our own. What better way to combine forces than in dreams? Dreams provide that grand junction where art, the spirit, and the scientific may meet without collision;<sup>2</sup> they afford that vast panorama, that energy of spirit, that enigmatic quality in myth, and yet mark out and modulate a rhythm that revitalizes and makes myth believable in our age. Myth, as Owen Barfield has said, is "not merely analogous to dream; [it] is a parallel manifestation;... it is the historical equivalent of what in <sup>the</sup> dream is present and personal."<sup>3</sup> Making one man's dreams into myth

1. Adrian Stokes, "Psycho-analysis and our Culture," Poetry Nation I (1973), p.100.
2. In 1931 Edmund Wilson proposed that the question of the conflict between art and science might one day be resolved: "... who can say that, as science and art look more and more deeply into experience and achieve a wider and wider range, and as they come to apply themselves more and more directly and expertly to the needs of human life, they may not arrive at a way of thinking, a technique of dealing with our perceptions, which will make art and science one?" It would seem that Berryman found a way in The Dream Songs. Axel's Castle, pp.234-35.
3. Owen Barfield, "Dream, Myth, and Philosophical Double Vision," ed. Joseph Campbell, Myths, Dreams, and Religion (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1970), p.218.

is not to advocate a kind of solipsism, but it is to advocate an incarnation in art, in the manner of Keats, Coleridge and Wordsworth of the human spirit and mind; it is to advocate an embodiment of felt universal truths. In our age, things seem to be a good deal less solid than they used to be; perhaps what we need most of all in our myth is an assurance that a hierarchy, inner or outer, does exist. It is not enough that the art form itself provide the calcified structure for our myth; the structure must be animated and determined by mind, body, and imagination. If this is true, then The Dream Songs reconstructs and sets into motion the complex rhythms of a believable inner hierarchy that assures; it comes as near a revised myth as an American has made since Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself."

## II. vi. Fragments, Complex Rhythms, and Spirals

Tell me, Muse, of the man of many ways, who was driven  
far journeys....

(The Odyssey (I, 1-2))

Like a geometer wholly dedicated  
to squaring the circle, but who cannot find,  
think as he may, the principle indicated --

So did I study the supernal face.  
I yearned to know just how our image merges  
into that circle, and how it there finds place....

"Paradiso"  
(xxciii, 133-38)

What to many early readers of The Dream Songs seemed to be fragments of ingenuity might now be recognized as building a deliberate and dynamic structure: the method of free association that dreams dictate, but a control that experience, art, and dream demand. In Henry's self-exploration, the reader, along with Henry, slowly grows in knowledge and awareness as the fragments resonate against one another until thought,

experience, and feeling begin to form circles of illuminating energy.

I have argued that experience and thought dovetail into a rhythmically self-ordering process which, over a long period of time, falls into a circuitous movement. Minds, Keats said, may "leave each other in contrary directions, traverse each other in numberless points" but will "at last greet each other at the journey's end."<sup>1</sup> The individual mind is like a spider which spins.

from his inwards his own airy Citadel --  
the points of the leaves and twigs on  
which the spider begins her work are few,  
and she fills the air with a beautiful  
circuiting. 2

The individual's experience of forming his own identity (one's awareness and understanding of self in time and in relation with others) forms a circle, so that we refer to the circle of our friends and might talk of the circle of selfhood. Richard Chase, in his study The American Novel and Its Tradition, goes so far as to say that "the symbol of the circle of selfhood may be taken as an archetype of the modern imagination, and especially [in America] where Puritanism has made itself felt."<sup>3</sup> Chase's idea might be that for the strict Puritan the self has only a former state of itself to circle back to, where a man of a less strict belief circles back to renewals or memories of old friendships. New friendships may also widen the circle and refresh the sense of selfhood. But the idea that man himself naturally follows circles and cycles has been a part of man's thinking from his first recorded history,<sup>4</sup> to Odysseus's going out and returning home, to Dante's yearning to know just how "our image" merges into the circle of God, to Eliot's return to Heraditus's, "the way up is the way down." The notion of man's circuitous nature and of his circuitous imagination particularly

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1. Forster, ed. Letters, p.103.

2. Ibid.

3. Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (Garden City: Double day & Co. Inc., 1957), p.217.

4. See Abram's chapter, "The Great Circle : Pagan and Christian Neoplatonism," Natural Supernaturalism, pp.146-154.

informs the English Romantic poets' thinking, and as we have observed, Berryman's poetry belongs to that tradition. The Dream Songs, like Wordsworth's The Prelude, is a private theodicy in which the poet seeks to find attachment to and bring into harmony the concrete conditions of life through love, patience, and humor. Both poets attempt both to step aside and to use man's "hateful siege of contraries" in order to give himself (and others) at least the appearance of harmony in the circle of his being. In the end, the circle is not merely a metaphor; it becomes a way of penetrating the very truths of man's existence.

The Romantic imagination, as with Berryman's imagination, creates what M.H. Abrams calls a "self-moving and self-sustaining system," a "system" that will not rest in stasis, though it is self-contained, a "system" which is based on contradictions as life's source.<sup>1</sup> The most important aspect of the Romantic imagination, which will enable us to see the wholeness of The Dream Songs, is not in terms of one complete circle which begins exactly where it ends, or even in a series of complete circles, but <sup>in terms of</sup> a spiral, a "self-moving circle" which

rotates along a third, a vertical dimension, to close where it had begun, but on a higher plane of value. It thus fuses the idea of the circular return with the idea of linear progress, to describe a distinctive figure of Romantic thought and imagination -- the ascending circle, or spiral. Hugo von Hoffmannsthal's later description of this design is terse and complete: "Every development moves in a spiral line, leaves nothing behind, reverts to the same point on a higher turning." 2

The rhythmic spiral of The Dream Songs may be viewed in at least two ways. If we take the view that a man's life begins as an egg, and that from that point of origin the spiral begins in short turns and ever widens to middle age and then narrows again in old age, then The Dream Songs may be seen as several large turns of the spiral. The Dream Songs may be seen also as a

1. See Abrams, "Forms of the Romantic Imagination," Natural Supernaturalism, pp.169-195.
2. Ibid., p.184.

spiritual quest in which, like Dante's Divine Comedy, Henry descends in a spiral to the "Inferno" and then ascends the spiral towards "Paradise." But paradise is not truly the end of The Dream Songs; the Songs are more a private theodicy in which Henry progresses in his relationships with others and his understanding of himself to a higher plane. It may only be said that the spiral of Henry's development is generally an ascending spiral after his descending one because even after he appears to be ascending, he feels himself to be in "the whole humiliating human round" (V, 121).

In the first three Parts Henry often feels that he is in the dark and descending deeper. He feels that he is a dog who "has taken itself & its tail considerably away/into mountains or sea or sky..."

(I, 14).<sup>1</sup> In Part III, Henry says,

I have been operating from nothing,  
like a dog after its tail  
more slowly, losing altitude.

(III, 54)

But by the end of Part III Henry, with his "head full/& his heart full, he's making ready to move on" (III, 77), which would indicate that he has reached the bottom of his descent. When Berryman was asked if there was a gap between 77 Dream Songs (i.e. Parts I, II, and III of The Dream Songs) and His Toy, His Dream, His Rest (the last four parts of the Songs) he said,

No, I don't see a gap; its a continuous relationship. Except there's this: at the end of the first volume, 77 Dream Songs, Henry goes into orbit.<sup>2</sup>

But Henry is not exactly shot out into space in Part IV; in fact his "Opus Posthumous" poems suggest that he remains at the bottom of his descent for a while and that perhaps he will slowly begin the ascent towards light.

1. Perhaps Berryman is varying Coleridge's description of "the snake with its Tail in its Mouth." See Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, pp.271-72.
2. McGlelland, et al., "An Interview with John Berryman," p.5. (my italics).

Not until Part VI, does Henry begin his ascent through love. He realizes that he cannot go back to the "onset," (the womb); his age demands that he advance, that he begin "to poke his head from Venus' foam," and

Thus his art started. Thus he ran from home  
toward home, forsaking too withal his mother  
in the most unbearable smother.

(VI, 166)

When through love his art starts,

The river of his wide mind broke the jam,  
somebody calls his wild wit riverine,  
sprayed thought like surf  
assigned to angles none, curve upon curve....

(VI, 182)

Art and his Lady continue to sustain Henry and they may even take him to "Paradise" (or rather, as much earthly paradise as he may know). Henry with his "typewriter" and "pencils" is

... circling, waiting for the tower & the marker  
the radio's out, some runways are brighter  
as we break Control & come down with our size.

(VI, 261)

At the beginning of Part VI, it becomes clearer that Henry may now be ascending up the spiral mountain of "Purgatorio." Among the books he takes with him to Ireland are "a Purgatorio" (VII, 279), and he says, ambiguously suggesting his circling, that he has "one other new book-0" (VII, 279). (The new book is Yeats's Last Poems which is made clear in Song 312.) He works on slowly, and he "stands up for much,/Wordsworth & that sort of thing"; the "pitcher" in Henry's dreams, throws "a hazy curve" (VII, 366), and Henry takes it in his stride, but says again ambiguously, "out I struck" meaning that he has "struck out" and <sup>is</sup> "setting out" on his journey. Now hope takes hold and he is "In sight of a more peaceful country, just beyond,/just in sight" (VII, 367); he leaves for the "new Land unknown & undistressed" (VII, 367). But he never ascends greatly (as he says in his last Song, his wings did not wish to fly greatly).

In the last Dream Songs Henry's circling reveals his advance: he returns to the grave of his father and finally lays his terrible ghost to rest; he now accepts, even with some joy, the dancer of death who whirls Henry away; and he sees himself as Odysseus (no longer a huffy Achilles as in an early Song) returning home, "purged by a dreamless night" (VII, 383).

It would be an extreme oversimplification to say that the complexity of Henry's thought, feeling, and experience should be seen as a simple spiral. If we want to see the development of the Songs as a metaphor, then perhaps we could say that the Songs are a sort of spiraling stream of Henry's past and present experience. Throughout the following discussion I find it more convenient, if inaccurate, to refer to Henry's journeys simply as circuitous, but it should be held in mind that the linear axis of time around which the circles move draws them into a spiral. At times the expression of Henry's journey through the uncharted regions of his mind and feeling is a voyage at sea, often drifting, but gradually finding purpose, with references to Odysseus and his search to return home. Elsewhere, Berryman's implied parallel is to Dante, who, like Henry in the crisis of middle age ("midway in our life's journey") went on a visionary and prophetic journey, relayed by guides, through hell to heaven. Henry's journey owes something to Odysseus and Dante's journeys, but since his is a Wordsworthian journey of the inquiring individual life, he can not rely upon Dante's assurance of the goal; he leaves "the ends aft open" and hopes to "touch the means/whereby we come to life" (VII, 305). So if Henry is to find the assurance of harmony it might very well be done without his realizing it, or if he does arrive at the harmony he so craves, then the vision is a hazy one. Those circles or cycles of which Henry is vaguely aware are few: the cycle of rebirth through his own children; the regenerative power of his art to "signal his fiery Passage" (IV, 79); and his merging into the dance of death. There are more subtle circles, of which Henry is not aware but obviously Berryman was:

the journey which bends into a circle through constant reference to the points of a compass; the unconscious emulation of heroes and mentors of the circuitous journey; the unconscious absorption into the cycles of days, nights, and the seasons; finally, the inevitable circular and paradoxical Fall -- a cycle of unity, fragmentation, and return (or almost in Henry's case) to a higher unity.

## II. vii. The Traveller Circling in the Points of His Compass

We have seen how important the figure of the traveller is to understanding The Dispossessed. Berryman in fact examined Odysseys, emulated spiritual explorers, became a traveller himself and relied upon the figure of the searching journeyer throughout his poetry, as these examples from The Dispossessed to Delusions, Etc. will verify:

Stare on, cold riot of the western mind  
Rock walking man, what can a wanderer know?

(T.D., p.89)

Lies  
And passion sing in the cabin on the voyage home....

(B.S., 25)

Strangers & pilgrims fare we here,  
declaring we see a City....

(Homage, 8. 4-5)

Ease in their passing my beloved friends,  
all others too I have cared for in a travelling life....

(L. & F., p.91)

Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages.

(D.E., p.vii)

Berryman often saw these journeys as regenerative and circuitous, as in The Dispossessed:

Wicked vistas! The wolves mourn for our crime  
 Out past the grey wall. On to our home,  
 Whereby the barley may seed and resume.

(T.D., p.94)

And he saw the circuitous journey not simply as a metaphor for man's desire for harmony but as a paradoxical expression of man's turbulent nature, "this whirlpool sheltered in bone" (D.E., p.12).

"The Quest," Auden said, "is one of the oldest, hardest, and most popular of all literary genres," and it finds "its validity as a symbolic description of our subjective personal experience as historical."<sup>1</sup> Henry's quest is no less the prototype of a "subjective personal experience as historical." Like Odysseus, Henry is driven far journeys in his dreams; like Dante he begins in forests of the soul. And like the poet of The Dispossessed Henry begins his journey frustrated and groping in the dark:

... combers out to sea  
 know they're goin' somewhere but not me.

(II, 40)

It is very dark in here in this groping forth.

(V, 99)

In the tension of mind and body, he sets out again and again:

... ancient fires for eyes, his head full  
 & his heart full, he's making ready to move on.

(III, 77)

I've booked our passage to a greener scene  
 and there my soul is earning.

(VI, 274)

Henry wishes for a guide, for he is not sure of his way; "Come & diminish me, & map my way" (I, 13), he pleads to anyone who will listen. No one seems to hear him, and so Henry sets out and "storms"

... off away without pause  
 across the sad ice  
 overlain with the tricky new of all the snow....

(VI, 209)

1. W.H. Auden, "The Quest Hero," Perspectives in Contemporary Criticism, ed. Sheldon Norman Grebstein (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p.371.

In the tradition of the Wandering Jew (Henry often considers himself an "imaginary Jew"), Odysseus, Cain and the Ancient Mariner, Henry wanders and travels extensively. From the green of the Ganges to the Black Hills in Dakota, from a bazaar in Tangier to a pub in Dublin, from the domes of the Kremlin to the temples of Athens, Henry packs his bags "thirty-four times, by count" (VII, 332). He suggests several reasons for his travelling:

... sometimes for money, sometimes for relief,  
sometimes of pure fatigue,  
sometimes a stroller through the mental feast....

(VI, 251)

Most often Henry travels for "the mental feast." In Part VII, where Henry gives some evidence of a fuller understanding of himself, he says of his travels,

I want to hear the interminable sea  
and my spiritual exercises for other civilizations  
are well under weigh.

(VII, 332)

He suffers under no illusions about the value of his travels to other civilizations; like his dreams which make him "wiser, on the whole but no more accurate" (VI, 263), Henry can't say that travel improves him, "but unquestionably it gave him some to think about..." (VII, 349). In an interview, Berryman makes a similar observation about Henry's travels:

The point in Henry was to investigate a man with many opportunities -- far more than those allowed to the lover in the Bradstreet poem -- many chances to observe and see what people of various nations are like, and what they do and are, and so on. 1

But Henry's observation informs us more; "spiritual exercises for other civilizations" emphasize his real quest for wisdom and truth along with his search for identity.<sup>2</sup> A further truth lies in Henry's "spiritual exercises," that of personal growth and development. Where Henry journeys

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1. Kostelanetz, "Conversation with Berryman," pp. 345-46.
  2. William Meredith, "Henry Tasting All the Secret Rits of Life : Berryman's 'Dream Songs'," Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, VI (Winter-Spring 1965), 32.

or why he journeys is not as important as the fact that he does journey, and that in his groping forth he matures. With no real rules, he plays it by ear, and his journey deepens in his "self-appointed task."

Henry travels and searches "as if the worlds would answer to a code/just around the corner..." (VII, 285). The world does not answer to a code for Henry; he studies other systems for answers: "I studied the systems long,/the High Systems" (VI, 259). Finally, he doubts the efficacy of all systems and programs, even his own:

He took a hard look  
at the programme of the years  
and struck his hardened palms across his ears  
& 'Basta!' cried: I should have been a noted crook  
or cat in a loud slum yes.

(VII, 343)

Programs aid Henry to the extent that they seem to help him make some sense out of what he is exploring and where he is going. His is a self-imposed task in which he has a fear of "proving unworthy" (VII, 299). Henry learns that as much as he needs the "formal & elaborate" he loves, too,

the spare, the hit-or-miss  
the mad, I sometimes can't always tell them apart  
As we fall apart, will you let me hear?

(VI, 265)

Henry does not change his "programme" of travelling and digging into layers, but rather he loosens it with "hit-or-miss." In the progress of his journey he learns to trust "playing it by ear." At the outset of his travels, he has trouble with his ears: "they" put "burning thumbs into his ears" (I, 8), and later when he is being buried, "his ear hurt. Left" (IV, 81). Henry discovers, "you go by the rules... but the rules don't matter" (VI, 204); he struggles to "play it by ear/out there until all's straight..." (VI, 278); and he concludes "all we know is ears" (V, 97).

Henry's perpetual travelling and striving would suggest random

and unrelated journeys, and if we see only the numerous places he actually or imaginatively visits it would appear so. But if we allow some distance, we will see that it is not so much the places Henry visits that are important as the points of the compass and what these points mean in his experience. It is as though North and South crash in upon Henry as he travels East and West, for in the South his father committed suicide "close by a smothering Southern sea" (III, 76), and in the North the specter of his father's ghost is a bear in an arctic cave. When Henry's "feet" are pointed to the South his eyes are "bleared west, wading to march" (V, 92); when his "house faces north," the eastern sun "dapples" his floor (V, 123). These directions are puzzling unless we remember the notion that the West suggests death (the setting sun) and the East suggests birth (the rising sun). When he dreams of his father's suicide, he wants to follow him into death, and his eyes look to the West. When he looks to the North where his father's ghost lives then he wants to go to the East, to return to a time of innocence and happiness before his father committed suicide. Henry is caught in the middle; though he longs to, he does not go West (death) and returning to "innocence" of the East is out of the question. Henry goes North with sugar in his hand for the "bear" (V, 120), but he finally must face South and make his "awful Pilgrimage" to his father's grave, to the "Florida dawn" (VII, 384) where his father shot himself. He has finally realized that indifference will not come and that he must forgive his father, take out his ax and "fell it on the start" (VII, 384); and thus, the North-South common symbolic meanings are reversed.

C.J. Jung, in his book Modern Man in Search of a Soul, compared the stages of the human life with primordial images of the rising and setting sun:

The one hundred and eighty degrees of the arc of life are divisible into four parts. The first quarter, lying to the east, is childhood -- that state in which we are a problem to others, but are not yet conscious

of any problems of our own. Conscious problems fill out the second and third quarters; while in the last -- in extreme old age -- we descend again into that condition, where unworried by our state of consciousness, we again become something of a problem for others. 1

Henry is at the third quarter of the arc; he not only must contend with the unconscious as in childhood and old age, but also with conscious things, his responsibilities as a citizen and as a house owner for example. But consciousness need not be a burden, for Henry uses his consciousness to arrive at an awareness of what to do about the deep psychic wound of his father's suicide.

Jung also contrasts the first half of man's life with the second half in terms of the daily course of the sun:

At the stroke of noon the descent begins. And the descent means the reversal of all the ideals and values that were cherished in the morning. The sun falls into contradiction with itself. 2

And of course this is precisely Henry's problem; he attempts to live by the principles and interests of his youth. In short, he suffers from an adolescent, self-centered imagination when he should be wiser. But the closer he gets to the West (death) the more he becomes aware that he cannot be wise if he remains huffy and petulant; he cannot really love someone if he continues to make passes at every female in sight. And so age brings mature love, some restraint, and a "degree of gentleness":

The progress of age helped him, to be not good but better:  
he restricted his passes to passes made by letters  
he drank less.

(VII, 350)

As Henry points towards one <sup>direction</sup> and then another <sup>within</sup> his personal compass, like all men, he suffers under the futility of circling like a dog chasing its tail, but he learns, too, the paradox of the circle: it is not only a futile enclosure but also a form of release. Henry both consciously and unconsciously discovers the metaphor and the experience of the circuitous, but upwardly and

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1. C.J. Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul, pp.130-31.
  2. Ibid., p.122.

outwardly spiralling journey that allows him to see, to accept, and to ease his journeying life. The circle in the end is not a mere "eternal return," a mere prison. Experiences are in a sense repeated again and again, but each time with more possible wisdom and understanding.

## II. viii. Henry's Sponsors and the Circuitous Journey

We have seen how important Berryman's "Overlords and Sponsors" were to his development and to his feeling of continuity with writers of the past. And so it would be that Henry's heroes are no less important to him. These are the "great men" who "spring on us in a second," and we "must be ready for a nod,/encountering a mystery" (VII, 335). Henry's heroes, like Berryman's, are to

witness to  
Show forth, transfigure: life-suffering & pure heart  
& hardly definable but central weaknesses....

(L. & F., p.34)

And they are to be "enemies throughout to accident & chance,/relentless travellers, long used to failure..." (L. & F., p.34). Henry's heroes are figures of awe and emulation; they give him security, confidence, and historical depth; as a result, he feels less alone in his journey across the ice and through the darkness.

Henry in a sense is attracted to his heroes without realizing why, for most of his heroes came to believe in the efficacy of the circuitous nature of thought and experience: Odysseus, Heraclitus, Augustine, Dante, Spenser, Pascal, Hegel, Hölderlin, Kleist, Keats, Wordsworth, Whitman, and Yeats. Each hero becomes a sort of unconscious Sponsor to Henry for each in his own fashion sorted out and resolved, if only temporarily, conflicting ideas and experiences in terms of the circle or spiral. Henry seeks out, ponders over, and reveres the German philosopher Henrich von Kleist and

the German Romantic poet Friedrich Hölderlin:

Hölderlin  
& Kleist, whom he clasped both to Henry's bosom:  
a suicide & a madman,  
to teach his lessons who was so far neither.

(VII, 310)

Henry resembles the protagonist in Hölderlin's Hyperion who recovers from the pain and suffering in the dark night of the soul; he journeys out but returns to his family and home in harmony with das Lebenlied der Welt in the spring. Henry's journey about the world resembles, too, what Kleist wrote in 1810: "We have eaten of the tree of knowledge. Now paradise is bolted shut, and the angel stands behind us. We must journey round the world and see whether it is open again somewhere on the yonder side."<sup>1</sup>

Kleist took the traditional view that man's journey back to paradise is a great circle. Clearly, Henry, consciously and unconsciously, imitates Hölderlin's journey away from and return to home ("All quarter astonishes a lonely out & back," [I, 177]) and Kleist's journey to "yonder side" as Henry realizes that his art is "one way to paradise" and when Henry's art begins he runs "from home/toward home" (VI, 166). I shall discuss later the Fall and great circle back to paradise; for now, Henry's reverence for Kleist who believed in the harmony of the circle is the point.

In other Songs Henry reveres Walt Whitman and G.W.F. Hegel; he even invites us to incorporate their philosophies in The Dream Songs:

Walt's "orbic flex," triads of Hegel would  
incorporate, if you please,  
into the know-how of the American bard  
embarrassed Henry heard himself a-being....

(IV, 78)

Henry as the "American bard" would have natural affinity with Walt Whitman.<sup>2</sup>

Whitman, too, travelled the world in his songs, listened to the "interminable

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1. Cited by Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, p.322.

2. Certainly Berryman felt strong affinity with Whitman: "I think the Model in The Dream Songs was the other greatest American poem -- I am very ambitious -- 'Song of Myself'...." John Berryman in an interview "The Art of Poetry," Paris Review Vol. 53 (Winter, 1972), 190-91.

sea," and observed his "spiritual exercises for other civilisation." And like Berryman, through Henry, he wanted to go on record as an individual in a particular time in history. Whitman's object was the same as Berryman's, "to investigate a man with many opportunities" at great risk to himself:

Sail forth -- steer for the deep waters only,  
Reckless O soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou with me,  
For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go,  
And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all. 1

In Whitman's "voyage of the mind's return/To reason's early paradise," he, like Henry, hears "himself a-being" in a circuitous journey back to lost paradise:

O soul, repressless, I with thee and thou with me,  
Thy circumnavigation of the world begin,  
Of man, the voyage of the mind's return  
To reason's early paradise,  
Back, back to wisdom's birth, to innocent intuitions,  
Again with fair creation. 2

Similar to Whitman's circuitous journey are Hegel's triads. Hegel's triad of thesis -- antithesis -- synthesis forms an ever-moving circle which stretches out into a spiral: as soon as one arrives at a synthesis, one has in effect arrived at another thesis which in turn has an antithesis and another synthesis, and so the triads might continue for as long as the mind lives. Hegel's triads are not in the strictest sense a dialectic in which a validity is established. His ever-moving triads do not hold to a hard-and-fast notion, but rather, to the temporary moment of a fixed answer. Hegel regarded reason as speculative thought which succeeds in temporarily reconciling opposites rather than playing tennis with opposites in an abstract way. Henry's thought speculates as well; even when he "made his peace & would no further roam,/He wondered... what it was about" (VII, 359). He ceaselessly sings "with infinite slowness finite pain" and reaches "into the corner of... his brain/to have it out" (VII, 305). For most of the

1. Walt Whitman, "Passage to India" (9: 248-51) Selected Poems and Prose, ed. A. Norman Jeffares (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p.194.
2. Ibid., (7: 169-174), p.191.

Songs Henry's frustration mounts towards guilt because he cannot establish even one valid answer to or reason for any of his struggles, "his almost endless destiny" (VII, 347). Like Hegel, Henry finally realizes the impossibility of reasoning out a strict dialectic. With all of his learning ("Leaves on leaves of books I've turned/And I know nothing... [VII, 370]) and with all of his "high-wrought designs/for a tranquil mind" (VII, 379), Henry concludes that his journey of thought never completely resolves but runs circuitously from fleeting moment to fleeting moment. Like Hegel's triads, whenever Henry finds a design that makes things clear, a new one begins to form. He wants "to fulfil a pledge/he gave himself to end a labour," but "strange & new outlines/blur the old project" (VII, 379). Hegel's philosophy of the circuitous journey is, like Henry's, in Abrams's phrase, "a painfully progressive self education":

...Hegel composed the Phenomenology of the Spirit as a Bildungsbiographie which is in a literal sense a spiritual history. It is in other words, a biography of the 'general spirit', representing the consciousness of each man and Everyman, the course of whose life is a painful progressive self education, rendered in the plot-form of a circuitous journey from an initial self-division and departure, through diverse reconciliations and ever renewing estrangements, conflicts, reversals and crises of spiritual death and rebirth. This plot turns out to be the unwitting quest of the spirit to redeem itself by repossessing its own lost and sundered self, in an ultimate recognition of its own identity whereby, as Hegel says in his concluding section, it can be "at home with itself in its otherness." 1

Hegel, in other words, is dealing with "the unlucky consciousness." Abrams could observe the same of The Dream Songs and hardly change a word.

To Wordsworth, whom Henry greatly admires, "growth" was seminal to life and poetry. Henry brims with praise for Wordsworth:

I stand up for much,  
Wordsworth & that sort of thing.

(VII, 366)

Wordsworth, thou form almost divine, cried Henry....

(VII, 380)

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1. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism pp.229-30.

Wordsworth dress the epithet "almost divine" from Henry perhaps because his own quest is not the avowed and elevated one of Wordsworth "as a pilgrim gone/In quest of highest truth."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, Henry in his own fragmented fashion searches for higher truths. Wordsworth and Henry have much in common in both the idea and the work in Growth of a Poet's Mind, the subtitle of The Prelude. Wordsworth's concern with the problem of human suffering, his conclusion that love is first and last, his evaluation of his own life, his conclusion that the past and the present belong to the same unitary person, and his celebration in the "glad preamble of this account of the growth of a poet's mind, 'Now I am free... Enough that I am free'"<sup>2</sup> -- all of these concerns, conclusions, and celebrations flow out of Henry as he grows. Growth to Wordsworth was neither an automatic nor a passive matter; Henry's struggle to self-identity involves the same capacity to respond consciously with sensitivity and intelligence to the world and those about him.

Similar to The Dream Songs, too, is the structure of The Prelude: both journeyers travel circuitously towards self-identity and unity.<sup>3</sup>

Abrams suggests that the design of The Prelude rounds "back to its point of departure":

The Prelude... is an involuted poem which is about its own genesis -- a prelude to itself. Its structural end is its own beginning; and its temporal beginning... is Wordsworth's entrance upon the stage of his life at which it ends. The conclusion goes on to specify the circular shape of the whole. Wordsworth there asks Coleridge to "call back to mind/The mood in which this Poem was begun".<sup>4</sup>

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1. William Wordsworth, The Prelude: A Parallel Text, ed. J.C. Maxwell (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1972), p.484.
  2. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, p.372.
  3. Apart from this structural device of the journey, other characteristics of The Prelude may be found in The Dream Songs: both omit some factual details and transpose or telescope many experiences; their purposes are to explore the psychology of a person, determining what experiences molded them. Interestingly, each work was regarded as fragmented but came to be regarded as a whole. Excerpts from both The Prelude and The Dream Song were printed before the complete works appeared, but when they were published, a closer reading made it apparent that each should be considered as a total work.
  4. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, p.79.

Similarly, Henry calls to mind the mood in which The Dream Songs began. Despite Henry's growth to maturity the last lines of the Songs recall the mood of ill temper in the first lines:

If there were a middle ground between things and  
 or if the sky resembled more the sea, the soul  
 I wouldn't have to scold  
 my heavy daughter.

(VII, 385)

Huffy Henry hid the day,  
 unappeasable Henry sulked.

(I, 1)

The difference between the beginning "sulking" and the ending "scolding" suggests Henry's change from childish resentment expressed in peevish sullenness to an adultlike, but gentle, scolding, but both do convey a distinct resemblance of mood in their ill temper.

The parallels of the image of the journey in The Prelude and The Dream Songs may be found at another level, that of allusions to other past circuitous journeys. In both, for example, there are connotations of Odysseus's search to return to his home. Compare the suggestion of Odysseus's journey in The Prelude and The Dream Songs:

What availed,  
 When spells forbade the voyager to land,  
 The fragrance which did ever and anon  
 Give notice of the shore, from arbours breathed  
 Of blessed sentiment and fearless love?

...  
 My business was upon the barren sea,  
 My errand was to sail to other coasts.  
 Shall I avow that I had hope to see,  
 I mean that future times would surely see,  
 The man to come, parted as by a gulph,  
 From him who had been.... 1

Dance in the gunwales to what they cannot hear  
 my lorn men. I bear every piece of it.  
 Often, in the ways to come,  
 Where the sun rises and fulfils their fear,  
 unlashd, I'll whistle bits.  
 Through the mad Pillars we are bound for home.

(VI, 243)

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1. Wordsworth, The Prelude, pp.466 and 468.

Wordsworth's "errand... to sail to other coasts" resembles Henry's wanting "to hear the interminable sea" in his "spiritual exercises for other civilizations" (VII, 332). Both Wordsworth and Henry, like Odysseus, are tossed about the sea, seemingly forbidden to land; as Henry laments, "the grand sea awaits us, which will then us toss/& endlessly undo" (VII, 303).

Near the end of his journey, Henry, who is "steeped in Homer," (VII, 292) is "august in Athens"; and he recalls that

Poseidon,  
ruined in Sounion, cares, in the hard cold wind,  
who gave hell to Odysseus.

(VII, 383)

Paradoxically, Poseidon "cares" simply because he "gave hell to Odysseus," for in Odysseus's suffering he emerges a nobler hero; and we have seen that Henry's enduring hell has made him nobler, though not noble in the classical sense. Besides "cunning" and "shrewd," Homer's favorite epithets for Odysseus are "long-suffering" and "enduring." Odysseus himself describes his tenacity and endurance:

... if some god batters me far out on the wine-blue water, I will endure it, keeping a stubborn spirit beside me, for already I have suffered much and done much hard work on the waves and in the fighting. 1

Henry's version of a "stubborn spirit" is called "the old survival test":

No harm in that, the old survival test.  
Pardon my sore toast, nominal & blunt  
& let's get on toward the sea.

(VI, 278)

Suffering much but surviving, Henry endures "like a pain-farm" (VI, 163), cultivating himself, as it were, and growing in strength; he does "much hard work on the waves and in the fighting."

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1. The Odyssey of Homer, trans. Richard Lattimore, (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p.94.

Throughout The Odyssey, and progressively in The Dream Songs, both Odysseus and Henry strive towards the absolute purpose of their homecoming. Odysseus, unhappy even in the blissful island of Kalypso, longs to return home:

... what I want and all my days I pine for  
is to go back to my house and see my day of homecoming. 1

Henry's longing for home, less definite in the beginning of his journey because he does not have a home, gradually forms into a strong purpose and need. Like Odysseus, Henry must sail "through the mad Pillars... bound for home" (VI, 243). On the one hand Henry feels that "travel's a plague" but on the other he feels "that's no matter. So is home" (VI, 252). Not until his third wife, his Lady, does Henry feel that he has a home that he can "love and twig a nest" (T.D., p.22) as the poet says in The Dispossessed. With his Lady and their daughter Twiss, "Henry's pride in his house was almost fierce..." (VII, 357). Henry recognizes as well another home, his own country of America. He says ironically, "Heaven is here/now in Minneapolis" (V, 119), but he comes to realize the truth of his irony. In the last Part, Henry, who is in Ireland, finds a house for himself and his family to live in for "all the workful months to come" (VII, 307). But work is not enough to make him feel at home; his sense of alienation increases in a foreign land (just as Odysseus felt alien on Kalypso's island): "he sinks back on his rented pillow, sore at heart,/amazed" (VII, 314). Henry joyfully anticipates his return to America: "back to my own country would I go/transparent, through the sky" (VII, 378). Henry returns home and he is welcomed:

The whole city turned out  
to rustle Henry home.  
He'd made his peace & would no further roam.  
He wondered only what it was about.

(VI, 359)

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1. Ibid.

Once Henry returns home he makes his "awful pilgrimage" to his father's grave and the Songs end in a celebration of American Thanksgiving. But a part of Henry's "conclusion" is his return to his ancient home, in Athens "at the end of the labour" (VI, 383). By including Greece as a part of his homecoming, he has in a sense completed another part of his circuitous journey, his experience has been made into the wholeness of art. He prays to Apollo, the god of poetry, not to Zeus, for in his labor of poetry he has found an ancient means by which he has come to know himself and his unknown possibilities, and his Sponsors like Odysseus have aided and guided in his return to this ancient fatherland.

## II. ix. The Cycle of the Seasons

When Henry says, "next time it will be nature & Thoreau" (VI, 265), he is not saying that he ignores nature altogether. His dreams "waken ancient longings" (VI, 271), and he must inevitably dream of the elemental forces of nature. Henry not only dreams of "our meaning to the Old World" (VII, 282) as an American attempting to find his roots in Europe, but also his meaning to the totem societies of ancient Europe where, as Robert Graves has said, "dances are seasonal and fitted into an annual pattern from which emerges the single grand theme of poetry: the life, death, and resurrection of the Spirit of the Year...."<sup>1</sup> And so another element of the stream of Henry's spiralling journey is added at an unconscious level by Henry's feeling for the season of the year. (Within the seasons of course is the cycle of night and day, a fairly obvious cycle which undulates between Henry's feeling alone, afraid, anxious, ignorant, and bestial, and his

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1. Graves, The White Goddess, p.422.

sense of the actual, calmness, knowledge, and rationale.) Henry's single grand theme of the cycle of life, death, and resurrection brings him into the "Spirit of the Year," or the cycle of the seasons. Just as he circles back towards home and harmony, so the seasons absorb Henry into a natural home and harmony.

Each season holds for Henry a particular significance. The coldness of winter offers escape: "It's cold and golden here in the snow" (I, 9); it suggests the mysteries of the distant and primordial: "It was wet & white and where I am/we don't know" (II, 28); it represents a condition of trial and purgation: "Think it a cross in the freezing wind" (II, 42); it suggests a condition of helplessness: "Thicker fears/condensed on him like ice" (VI, 247); and finally with Henry stuck in the cold, it is the place to seek atonement when he attempts to appease his dead father who is masked as a bear in an Arctic cave (V, 120). In this dead season Henry realizes that possibilities of life and change do exist. In the early Songs, Christmas holds no real meaning for Henry: there are "No Christmas jaunts for fractured cats" (III, 65). But in a later Song Henry finds hope for his own rebirth in the Christmas season:

Behold I bring you tidings of great joy --  
especially now that the snow & gale are still --  
for Henry is delivered.

(V, 124)

The cause for Henry's hope in winter has been revealed a few poems previous: he has attempted to be friendly with the <sup>c</sup><sub>A</sub>rtic bear, his father, rather than kill the memory of him, and he strives to forgive him:

It was 28 below.  
No one goes anywhere. Fabulous calls  
to duty clank. Icy dungeons, though,  
have much to mention to you.

....  
Pardon was the only word, in ferocious cold  
like Asiatic prisons, where we live  
and strive and strive to forgive.

(V, 108)

For most of his life he cannot forgive his father for having committed suicide, but now he contemplates in the icy dungeon of winter the hope that "Pardon was the only word."

One would expect the summer season, that season of the fullness of life, to be a time of fullness for Henry. But it is not; both "snows and summers grieve and dream" (III, 77). Henry grieves in the summer because of his past; in the summer dawn his father committed suicide, leaving "Henry to live on" (V, 145). In a poem entitled "July 8" (V, 100), we learn of another summer grief: his mother dies on that day. And yet Henry survives the summers. In another poem entitled "July 11," the day of Delmore Schwartz's death, Henry begins to overcome his summer grief:

And yet I find myself able, at this deep point,  
to carry out my duties: I lecture, I write.

(VI, 275)

The only suggestion of happiness in the summer is in a celebration of his Lady's birthday on July 28 (V, 106). Henry's deep feeling for his Lady helps him to survive the summers; she represents the opposite of what the winter and summer mean to him; and he praises her in terms of the seasons that make him sad:

Into your face  
for summers now -- for three --  
I have been looking, and for winters  
and never at any time have you resembled snow.

(VI, 186)

Henry's Lady does not allay his fears; later he pleads in "July 22":

Something's gotta give  
either in edgy Henry or the environment:  
the conflict cannot last....

(VI, 275)

If both summer and winter hold no lasting hope for change in Henry's struggle, then what of fall and spring? The fall season is complex in Henry's dreams. It suggests not only that season but also the "fall" from

the se<sup>cu</sup>re fetal sack and the Fall of man. (For the present I shall limit my discussion to the fall season.) Henry struggles through fall as he does winter and summer. In the fall, the American Thanksgiving epitomizes for Henry a "summing up" of "that which one bears more steadily than else/ and the odd definite good" (VI, 163). Instead of a season of happy harvest, Henry broods on fall as the dying season. Another one of Henry's oldest friends is killed and he laments:

All those deaths keep Henry pale & ill  
and unable to sail through the autumn world & weak,  
a disadvantage of surviving.

The leaves fall, lives fall, every little while  
you can count with stirring love on a new loss  
& an emptier place.

(VI, 191)

Leaves falling and lives falling incorporate phases of the whole cycle of birth and death in nature. In the dying season of fall and the dead season of winter Henry suggests that, for him, work will make him vital enough to continue:

Fallen leaves & litter. It is September.  
Henry's months now begin. Much to be done  
by merry Christmas,  
much to be done by American Thanksgiving.

(VI, 309)

But in the last Song Henry celebrates a Thanksgiving of new life at the end of his labor; his poems become his daughter, his new birth. Since in the progress of the Songs Henry has matured and changed, his view of the fall season logically changes. In the last Song, we find that Henry's Thanksgiving is a celebration of a happy harvest rather than simply a lamentation of dying. He learns the paradox of fall as a season to celebrate both life and death.

As one might expect, spring, with its energy of new life, revitalizes and renews Henry. In his rhythmic cycle of the seasons spring "returns with a dance and a sigh" (II, 27). No hint of loss, suffering, or

death diminishes Henry's springs. The only suggestion of pain for him is when spring lays bare all that the winter snows covered; Henry is constrained to consider the life beneath winter's mantle of inactivity:

Wan shone my sun on Easter Monday, -- ay,  
On Monday wan, and yet the snow has ceast.  
Filthy, my grass appears.  
Pavements appear. It's spring in Minnesota.  
My summer-house limps....

One of my steps is broken, free from ice,  
I notice....  
He was always in love with the wrong woman  
we can't go on here, which would not be nice  
nor true.

## (VI, 213)

The winter snows cease with the coming of the spring, and they cease in Henry when he stops fooling himself that he has always been in love with the wrong woman. In a real sense he is renewed when he realizes that he himself might be a cause, perhaps the cause, of his unhappy marriages. Though one of his steps is broken, his "house" is free from his own delusion; the hope of Easter is his own hope. More significantly, in spring Henry is re-born when he decides to forgive his father for committing suicide. In the summer season Henry considers forgiving his father, but in the spring on Memorial Day (the fourth Monday in May), he decides to forgive his father:

Henry, absent on parade, half-triggered, mourned  
on Memorial Day a many of my dead  
and all of the living.  
He finally decided: It's forgiving.

## (VI, 268)

Thus the seasons are both emblematic of and bound to Henry's conscious and unconscious concerns. The cycle of his personal struggles arrive at some harmony and appropriately fuse with the cycle of the seasons.

## II. x. The Great Circle of the Fall

Another aspect of Henry's conscious and unconscious circuitous journeys is his desire to return to Paradise. Henry becomes increasingly aware of the meaning of the Fall to himself as he travels. As we have seen, "Fall" is another of those words in Henry's dreams that folds into several meanings but most often it relates to the Fall of man. In the Christian view, one may regard the Fall of man as both inflicting and resolving death: because of the Fall, man must experience death ("Ashes, Ashes. All fall down" [VI, 253]), but through death man may regain Eden. Such a view of course is circuitous: first, man's life in Eden and death of that life; then follows mortal life and death of that life which will return man to the lost life of Eden. But Henry sees himself as twice banished from "home"; he has Cain's mark on his forehead (II, 51); Cain's parents were banished from Eden; and he was banished from his parent's home. Since the Fall, man's harmony has been fragmented, and Henry's sense of fragmentation is expressed in the verb "fall." The first Song, "nothing fell out as it might or ought" (I, 1), contrasts with a Song near the end, "at Henry's bier let some thing fall out well..." (VII, 382), and we note a change in Henry's attitude towards his condition (from a self-pity to humility), but at the same time things still "fall out" and this suggests that Henry will always feel fragmented.

The circle which the Fall creates is essentially unity, unity lost, and unity to be regained,<sup>1</sup> and Henry's journey in his fallen and fragmented condition enacts the universal struggle to recover unity. Throughout The Dream Songs, Henry laments his fragmentation and division:

... it's broken down here....

(II, 34)

... Henry's parts were fleeing.

(IV, 78)

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1. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, p.181.

I am fleeing double.

(V, 114)

His sense of fragmentation is often expressed as dying again and again: "My wood or word seems to be rotting./I daresay I'm collapsing. Worms are at hand" (IV, 85). Henry longs for harmony and desires to return to an original unity:

I've had enough of this dying.  
You've done me a dozen goodnesses; get well  
Fight again for our own,  
My italics

(V, 119)

The pronoun "our" suggests not only Henry's desire for wholeness but also an essential human need: all of us, he is saying, must "fight again" for our own. Significantly, Henry expresses a solution to his "piecedom" in the figure of a voyager; he himself is a ship headed "fore & aft" (as we shall see, his "craft" is also his art):

... we reckon what is left,  
not what was lost.  
I notice at this point a divided soul,  
headed both fore & aft and guess which soul  
will swamp & lose:

that hoping forward, brisk & vivid one  
of which will nothing ever be heard again.  
Advance into the past!

(VII, 325)

Henry seldom uses an exclamation, but he does so here because advancing into the past provides him with a happy possibility of ending his fragmentation. For him to arrive at unity, he realizes, he must more consciously advance into man's past of original unity. Like Robert Frost, whom Henry praises (he laments most for Schwartz) more than any other poet Henry realizes that he will "see" himself at his original source. As Frost said in "West Running Brook":

It is this backward motion toward the source,  
Against the stream, that most we see ourselves in,  
The tribute of the current to the source.

Henry's beginning is also his end; his unconsciously lost unity is his conscious unity to be regained.

Once Henry is aware of his original unity, he suffers under the terrible burden of the freedom to overcome disunity:

He can't work well... here, or think.  
A bilocation, yellowlike catastrophe.  
The name of this was freedom.

(III, 52)

The burden of Henry's freedom is so terrible that he wishes to live in the "middle world" of Fall: "He would be prepared to live in a world of Fall/ for ever, impenitent Henry" (III, 77). But the more his shaky framework fragments the more he wishes to end his broken condition; he searches for a beginning and realizes that he must play out the Fall by ear: "Only his ears sat with his theme" (VI, 165).

This freedom allows Henry, he begins to understand, to journey towards man's original condition of unity, and he sees finally that the Fall accounts for his inner disruption of heart and mind as well as his inability to feel at one with nature. At the end of his journey Henry acknowledges that if heart and mind, and nature, and mind, and heart were one, he would not have to struggle to find a middle ground. "We will do our best for the cause of the brain/though sea-foam tugs..." (VI, 274), Henry promises, and so he does. He burns for reasoned solutions, but his senses often interfere, and though he would renounce his senses (V, 120), they stir restlessly below his repression. He tries to live in either extreme of heart or mind, but finally he settles for, happily, a fusion of heart and mind, and letting the mind settle for power of "Negative Capability." He expresses gratitude to a poetess, Adrienne Rich, for her "high kindness" to him; she has counseled him in a unity of heart and mind:

And now I meet you in the thinky place,  
 you & I, your good brain & hot heart  
 counselled Henry on  
 in his heavy labour....

(VII, 362)

What her advice was he does not say; the point seems to be that her "good brain" and her "hot heart" counsel ed him.

Henry's "heavy labour" shapes for him one mending force of his division, for in art the ideal would be a harmony of heart and mind. Henry's senses vie for domination, but his mind, as he thrashes out thought in his songs, will not allow it:

Hunger was constitutional with him,  
 women, cigarettes, liquor, need need need  
 until he went to pieces.  
 The pieces sat up and wrote. They did not need  
 their piecedom but kept very quietly on  
 among the chaos.

(VII, 311)

"Valiant art" bores immature Henry (I, 14), but a more mature Henry can understand that art may help him to circle back towards lost Eden:

A stub point: one odd way to Paradise  
 ha ha! but of more dignity than my typewriter,  
 than my marvellous pencils, darker.  
 We're circling, waiting for the tower & the marker  
 the radio's out, some runways are brighter  
 as we break Control & come down with our size.

(VI, 261)

Henry begins the final Part of his Dream Songs with both a high resolve and a statement about his private theodicy of how he might return to Paradise:

If ever he had crafted in the past --  
 but only if -- he swore now to craft better  
 which lay in the Hands above.

(VII, 279)

As I have suggested in my discussion of the last Dream Song, Henry's "craft" of art gives him an assurance of power that is its own reward. Henry's "craft" of the long poem is like Keats's description of the long poem as "a

test of invention," which Kests took to be "the Polar Star of Poetry," wherein "Fancy is the Sails, and Imagination the Rudder."<sup>1</sup> With "fancy" (the association in dreams) as his sails and "imagination" (the unity of the deep-structures in dreams) as his rudder, Henry is circling back towards the source of his original harmony with more assurance and purpose, though he realizes that until he dies he will not accomplish that harmony.

## II. xi. The Harmony and Circularity of Numbers

The answer to the question of the relation between the temporal and the eternal and the fusion of the two is beyond human understanding. Man, as Henry concludes, is guided only up to a certain point (that is, relative to his ability and persistence) by his intellectual powers and he can recognize at best the circle of his being but not fully understand why it circles back. As we have seen, Henry's own rebirth is complemented by but merges into other natural cycles of birth, death, and rebirth: Henry's rebirth through his "daughters"; his circuitous journey to his actual home, his own country, his cosmic home, and his eternal home; his merging with the cycle of the seasons; and his circuitous journey towards lost Eden. His salvation is his birth of recognition and awareness, not of a revelation, and these are his understanding.

To regard the structure of The Dream Songs as a pagan mystery-ritual of death, rebirth, and salvation is to lay out the circuitous structure thematically, but we may see also an artistic circular harmony. Just as Berryman enjoyed an advantage of perspective in creating the character Henry, so he enjoyed the advantage of perspective in arranging the parts of The Dream Songs into a whole; the parts, in fact, even down to the the stanzaic structure, conform to a strict classical, symmetrical, and arithmetical circuitous

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1. Forman, ed. Letters, p.53.

structure. This structure complements Henry's circuitous journey by way of the numbers of three, five, and seven. There are three stanzas in nearly every Song and each stanza is a multiple of three (six lines). The stresses per line in each stanza (for the most part) are 5-5-3-5-5-3. The 385 Songs are a multiple of 5. The number seven informs the Songs most; from the title of the first publication (77 Dream Songs) Berryman has been anxious to tell us so. The 385 Songs are also a multiple of 7; there are seven epigraphs; Book IV, the central and shortest book, consists of fourteen Songs, a multiple of seven; and of course there are seven parts.<sup>1</sup> Such a conscious arithmetical structure recalls a classical heritage in which numbers reflect a way of thinking. Three and seven were Homer and Dante's favorite numbers; five was the customary number of episodes in Greek tragedy. In medieval thought, especially, these numbers (and others such as two, four, nine, ten, and twelve) reflect the principles of order, harmony, and the hierarchy of God's creation. Certain numbers suggest a number mystique and are signs of God's plan and therefore point beyond themselves to spiritual meanings. Three represents the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; the three theological virtues, Faith, Hope, and Charity (or Love); the three theological vices, Envy, Hate, and Malice; the past, present, and future; the three parts of man -- spirit, rationality, emotional drive (in modern terms of super-ego, ego, and id). Five recalls the number of wounds Christ received on the cross. Seven stands for the seven days of God's creation; the seven stations of the cross; the seven cries from the cross; and the seven griefs of the Virgin. In late classical literature, Apuleius describes in Golden Ass Lucius's invocation of Cybele (the goddess of "white raiser, red reaper, and dark winnower of grain") and his preparation to pray to the Goddess after his sleep:

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1. The number seven appears several times in The Dream Songs: see 115, 246, and 366.

Wherefore, shaking off my drowsy sleep I arose with a joyful face, and moved by a great affection to purify myself, I plunged my head seven times into the water of the sea; which number seven is convenable and agreeable to holy and divine things, as the worthy sage philosopher Pythagoras hath declared. Then very lively and joyfully, though with weeping countenance, I made this oration to the puissant goddess. 1

There is also a primitive heritage of numbers. (I have suggested that dreams are primitive ways of thinking; it follows that numbers would possess distinctive attributes in such a way of thinking.) "To the natural unsophisticated mind," H.G. Baynes says in his Mythology of the Soul, "the cardinal numbers 3, 5, 7, 9... are felt to be positive, living, and masculine...."<sup>2</sup> Baynes makes a distinction between odd and even numbers:

The odd numbers 7... are associated with the principle of Yang /the masculine principle/ in the Chinese Yi King, while 2, 4, 6, 8 are identified with that of Yin /the feminine principle/. In general the odd numbers have a creative or energetic character, while the even numbers are static, being already balanced and complete. 3

Given Berryman's knowledge of Chinese culture (see his poem "Scholars at the Orchard Pavilion" in Delusions, Etc., pp.34-35), it is quite possible that he had the Chinese Yin-Yang in mind in choosing odd numbers to structure The Dream Songs. His use of odd numbers suggests the creative, masculine, energetic and incomplete character he wanted. But most certainly he knew Jung's works on the archetype in dreams. Jung stressed triads and the importance of raising numerical data "to the level of a general concept":

Triads and tetrads represent archetypal structures that play a significant part in all symbolism and are equally important for the investigation of myths and dreams. By raising the irrational datum /of dreams/... to the level of a general concept we elicit the universal meaning of this motif and encourage the inquiring mind to tackle the problem seriously. 4

1. Cited by Graves, The White Goddess, pp.70-71.
2. H.G. Baynes, Mythology of the Soul (London: Rider & Company, 1969), p.493.
3. Ibid.
4. C.G. Jung, Four Archetypes, trans. R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p.121.

Part of what Jung assumes is that symbols have the character of living and that numbers in dreams are not imposed upon experience, but flow out of experience and are therefore dynamic symbols. When Henry says that Hegel's triads "would/underline>incorporate" (IV, 78) (my italics) into The Dream Songs, he is suggesting that a numerical way of thinking is not to impose, it is to discover, as Wallace Stevens would say.<sup>1</sup> Jung also said, "Between the three and the four there exists the primary opposition of male and female, but whereas fourness is a symbol of wholeness, threeness is not."<sup>2</sup> It is significant that Henry would say at the beginning of Part IV that Hegel's triads "would incorporate" into The Dream Songs because he has come to the end of a triad after the first three parts and now in the fourth part he is in a state of wholeness. Though Henry is never in a state of harmony as long as he lives, he will be "whole" once he is dead; thus, each Song in Part IV is called "Op. posth." After Part IV another triad follows because Henry does not really die; he returns "adult & difficult." Jung said of the number seven that "in the language of initiation, 'seven' stands for the highest stage of illumination and would therefore be the coveted goal of all desire."<sup>3</sup> As we have seen, and will see in more detail, by the end of Part VII, Henry arrives at the "highest stage of illumination" he can expect.

If we were to enumerate all the attributes and qualities associated with the number 7," Baynes has said, "we might fill a volume without being appreciably nearer to any definite signification."<sup>4</sup> Baynes concluded, nevertheless, that the number seven "represents an essential part of the creative process."<sup>5</sup> What this "creative process" entails, Baynes was not

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1. Stevens, "Notes Towards a Supreme Fiction," Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens, p.403.
  2. Ibid., p.112.
  3. C.G. Jung Psychology and Alchemy, Vol.12, 2nd ed., The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, eds. Herbert Read et.al., trans. R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), p.63.
  4. Baynes, Mythology of the Soul, p.493.
  5. Ibid.

able to say precisely, but perhaps, he suggested, it has something to do with the make-up of our cosmo-logical and physical characteristics (e.g. seven days creation and the seven orifices of the body),<sup>1</sup> which in turn permeate man's unconscious thinking. Baynes suggested, too, that the number three is "specifically associated with the creative process":

For not only are the male and female organs of generation disposed in the form of a trinity, but the very archetypal of creation, projected into the Deity, obeys the same form. Every function of energy in nature has, indeed, the form of a pair of opposites, united by a third factor, their product. 2

Henry's triads of thought are complemented in the same way: the "product" of his union with his wife is their daughter; and since his Dream Songs are his "daughter" they are the "product" of Henry's heart and mind.

I have been suggesting that a sort of number mystique points to the spiritual meanings of The Dream Songs, but certainly these particular recurring numbers allude to and set the Songs within the classical tradition of circuitous harmony and order which both contrast with and run parallel to that tradition. The Dream Songs contrasts with the classical tradition in that Henry's journey is incomplete but is similar to it in its "feel" of being a complete poem. The number three stresses the cyclical pattern in The Dream Songs: Hegel's triads; Henry's attempt to fuse his past, present, and future; his attempt to balance his ego, id, and super-ego; and his happiness and fullness at the end of the third summer with his Lady. The number three might suggest spiritual meanings, but more concretely, it directs the Songs as a whole towards a harmonious, cyclical pattern. The number seven, the most important number in the arithmetical structure of the Songs, functions similarly. We may regard the seven parts as an arithmetical symmetry of 3-1-3, but in view of the cyclic nature of The Dream Songs, it would be more logical to see the seven parts in terms of the circle as well. Henry's circuitous journey may be seen numerically and

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1. Ibid., pp.493-94.

2. Ibid., p.495.

similar to Odysseus's thirteen adventures which conform to the symmetrical, geometrical ideal of ancient Greek design, in this instance 6-1-6. Hades becomes the center of the epic structure; Odysseus travels towards Hades and away from Hades in a perfectly concentric pattern. Henry's journey conforms to the same concentric pattern with his "death," burial, and return in the central Part (significantly, Part IV consists of a multiple of seven). One finds the same concentric pattern in the Divine Comedy where at the exact center of the poem Dante learns from Vergil that the cosmic force which determines all things (evil as well as good) is love. Or again in the "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," which consists (perhaps significantly to The Dream Songs) of seven parts,<sup>1</sup> at the center of the poem, Part IV, the narrative turns and the mariner is saved both physically and spiritually when he looks upon the sliny creatures of the deep and blesses them; then the albatross falls from his neck into the sea and he begins his journey home. It follows that Berryman, who regarded himself as an "epic" poet,<sup>2</sup> would have had in mind the circuitous numerical patterns of past epics and long poems.

## II. xii. The Circle of Love

... the Loves a circle go  
The flaming circle of our days,  
Gyring, spiring to and fro....

"The Two Trees"  
W.B. Yeats

Berryman, who was always keenly aware of his Americanness, said that he had taken Whitman's "Song of Myself" as his model for The Dream Songs.<sup>3</sup>

1. In this connection, W.H. Auden's The Age of Anxiety depicts a regenerative journey in seven stages.
2. Stitt, "The Art of Poetry : An Interview with John Berryman," p.199.
3. Stitt, "The Art of Poetry : An Interview with John Berryman," pp.190-91.

While The Dream Songs is unlike "Song of Myself" in that it is not a "wisdom work" (i.e. a work on the meaning of life and how to conduct it), there are remarkable similarities between them in method and structure. In method, both are dramatic representations of an energetic and robust man's experience of finding self-unity ("a single separate person")<sup>1</sup> and yet finding harmony with others ("Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse"<sup>2</sup>). The structural similarities between the two poems are more complex, mainly because neither poem has a clearly definable structure. Yet in each there would seem to be some concrete reasons for their divisions or parts. "Song of Myself," for example, is divided into fifty-two sections which suggest the number of weeks in the year and thus the cyclical organic nature of the poem; similarly, as I have suggested, the seven parts of The Dream Songs suggest the Biblical cycle of the creation and other more complex numerical thinking. One might make numerous comparisons and conjectures about each poem's structure, but it seems to me that James E. Miller's illuminating analysis of "Song of Myself" invites an equally illuminating comparison with The Dream Songs.

Miller draws on Evelyn Underhill's Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of man's Spiritual Consciousness (1926) for his analysis of "Song of Myself," and he recalls the five "phases of the mystical life: (1) the awakening of self; (2) the purification of self; (3) illumination; (4) the dark night of the soul; (5) union."<sup>3</sup> Miller finds in "Song of Myself" an "inversion of some of the steps in the mystic way... held by the traditional mystic."<sup>4</sup> and sees \_\_\_\_\_ of the poem as falling into seven divisions rather than five; nevertheless, the pattern of the whole poem as he analyzes it remains quite similar to Underhill's:

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1. Whitman, "One's Self I Sing," Selected Poems and Prose, p.184.
  2. Ibid.
  3. James E. Miller, Jr., A Critical Guide to "Leaves of Grass" (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p.7.
  4. Ibid.

- I. Entry into the mystical state
- II. Awakening of self
- III. Purification of self
- IV. Illumination and the dark night of the soul
- V. Union (faith and love)
- VI. Union (perception)
- VII. Emergence from the mystical state 1

Disregarding Miller's case for mysticism, we may regard these seven stages as a journey towards regeneration. The seven parts of "Song of Myself" and The Dream Songs may be seen as successive stages, but each part may also be seen as part of the curve bending into a circle. The arithmetical symmetry of each poem, 3-1-3, suggests that the fourth part is set apart but it would be more accurate to see Part IV as the journeyer s' having come to a sharpened awareness and turning back to their source to a higher plane: Whitman in the fourth stage, as Miller interprets "Song of Myself," is "afoot" with his vision, and Henry in Part IV is digging like mad, Lazarus with a plan" (IV, 91). After the fourth part, or stage, each hero truly begins his journey towards regeneration.

Clearly Berryman intended that The Dream Songs should be seen as a parallel to Whitman's "Song of Myself," particularly a parallel with Whitman's sense of a cyclical ebb and flow of life. Henry says at the beginning of Part IV (significantly, he would think of Whitman at the beginning of his own "illumination in the dark night of the soul"):

Walt's "orbic flex"... would  
incorporate, if you please  
into the know-how of the American bard....

(IV, 78)

And again later in Part V,

Henry broods & recedes.  
Like the great Walt, come find him on his way  
somewhere. I hear thunder in stillness.

(V, 140)

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1. Ibid.

The structural similarities between "Song of Myself" and The Dream Songs go deeper and spread more evenly. The rhythmic cycle of the seven parts of Henry's regeneration might be viewed in terms similar to those of Miller's analysis of the regenerative pattern in "Song of Myself":

- I. Introduction to "huffy" and "unappeasable" Henry.
- II. Awakening of Henry's physical self.
- III. His intensity of seeking answers.
- IV. Illumination of life in the darkness of death.
- V. Union: love (Henry and his Lady).
- VI. Perception: firmness in love and forgiveness of loss.
- VII. Henry emerges more vital and less fragmented.

Henry's union of love is not that of Whitman's union with the Transcendent, but the behavior of each hero in the progress of his poem is the same in a rhythm of "going into" and "coming out of." The knowledge gained by each is similar as well: a temporary reconciliation of opposites, and an acceptance of the limits of the human knowledge, accompanied by a fleeting insight into the wholeness of man.

In a sense, the symmetrical pattern (3-1-3) of entry into and emergence from      is linear, but Whitman and Berryman manage to combine both linear and spiralling structures. Similar to the Fall in which man circles back to his beginning to a higher unity, each hero in The Dream Songs and "Song of Myself" journeys out and circles ever outward but ever upwards to bend round, a "knot of identity" as Whitman says, to their beginnings.

Henry journeys from a division from others and to a return to them in a mature union of love which will serve to illustrate how his journey in time curves round into a spiral. Henry's awareness of the meaning of love has two sources: Henry himself and the person he loves. In the first half of Henry's journey, he regards the person he would love as a physical object, and he loves that person selfishly; but after Part IV he realizes that he, too, may be a source of love: he learns that

all degrees of love  
from sky-blue down to spiriting blood, down to  
the elder from the new,  
loom sanctuaries we are pilgrims of....

In order for him to make his pilgrimage towards an awareness of the "degrees of love" in the "sanctuaries" of love, he journeys from a physical attachment to others into a detachment from himself and from others. He takes on a "voluntary loneliness," similar to Freud's description of safeguarding oneself from a human commitment which has risks: "Voluntary loneliness, isolation from others, is the readiest safeguard against unhappiness that may arise out of human relations."<sup>1</sup> Henry emerges from his detachment renewed. He returns ready to risk a full commitment to others, for through others he will return to the source of his real beginning of self-understanding and a mature love. Thus, a linear growth of love is made circular in that he circles away from but back to the same source. His circular entry into darkness (Part IV) and emergence from it is suggested by the following general outline of Henry's concept of love and the way he treats others.

<u>Henry's Love</u>	<u>Henry's Treatment of Others</u>
I. Inability to love; love is "beastly"	I. Person a love object
II. Mourns "the death of love"	II. Person a love object
III. Realizes "the horror of unlove"	III. Person still a love object but wishes to "pass from lust"
IV. Buried: devoid of love; hope for someone to "waken" him to love	IV. Buried: absence of people; hope for someone to "waken" him to love
V. Declares "a mystery of love"	V. Hopes with a "hurtless love" "to allow grace a while to stay"
VI. "Fails to keep assigning the same concept to 'love'"	VI. The "subject" is Henry's love for his Lady and he is the "object"
VII. "Deep in extra love" his "heart sings, serve, serve"	VII. Love broadens to a selfless concern for others; Henry is considerate and sensitive

Henry's love, like a stray body in space, passes through a void, Part IV, but slowly his Lady's love pulls him into her field and the two revolve one

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1. Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, p.29.

about the other; she brings wandering Henry into the wholeness of love:

She saw through things, she saw that he was lonely  
and waited while he hid behind the wall....

(V, 118)

She is the "one" he has hoped for when he is in the void of darkness:

Which one will waken him?

O she must startle like a fallen gown,  
content with speech like an old sacrament  
in deaf ears lying down,  
blazing through darkness till he feels the cold  
& blindness of his hopeless tenement....

(IV, 89)

Her love teaches him the meaning of love, and he praises her in his "Envoy,"  
a Song disarming in its simplicity and moving in its genuine feeling; Henry  
not only loves her physically but also as a friend:

Go, ill-spiced book, and whisper to her or  
storm out the message for her only ear  
that she is beautiful.  
Mention sunsets, be not silent of her eyes  
and mouth and other prospects, praise her size,  
say her figure is full.

Say her small figure is heavenly & full,  
so as stunned Henry yatters like a fool  
& maketh little sense.  
Say she is soft in speech, stately in walking,  
modest at gatherings, and in every thing  
declare her excellence.

Forget not when rest is wholly done  
and all her splendours opened one by one  
to add that she likes Henry,  
for reasons unknown, and fate has bound them fast  
one to another in linkages that last  
and that are fair to see.

(VI, 171)

Throughout his travelling, Henry tries to understand Divine Love, but  
he cannot:

I mention what I do not understand.  
I mention for instance Love:  
God loves his creatures what he treats them so?

(VI, 266)

Instead, he happily settles for an individual human realization of love, his Lady's love, and through her, his concept and practice of love broadens:

Halfway to death, from his young years, he failed  
to keep assigning to the concept of 'love'  
the usual value.  
The heat of the chase yielded to ease & paled  
midday which once he could not have enough of,  
affections old to new

much he preferred....

(VI, 160)

With the strength of her love (their marriage symbolizes the oneness of life, and out of this oneness they continue the cycle when a baby is born), Henry forgives his father and celebrates his love for him (VI, 268); he is more sympathetic towards others as he weeps because another person weeps (VI, 242); he feels empathically for the "disabled fates" of "two ladies dear/with problems, problems" (VII, 302); he sympathizes with a woman who suffers from "an inability to respond" to love (VII, 358); and after overcoming strong temptation to be unfaithful to his wife with a woman "more beautiful... even than Henry's wife" (VII, 289), he sympathetically admonishes this beautiful woman to

Let one man in.  
One is enough.  
Fish for the master, who will do you well,  
rely not on the stormy citadel --  
it's a matter of love.

(VII, 372)

She has already noticed a "small improvement" in Henry, "a degree of gentleness" (VII, 350). Henry has come full circle in his relation to others: at first he is "at odds wif de world" (I, 5), and he loves others selfishly; then he withdraws from the world as a safeguard against commitment; but he finally returns to a more selfless love for others -- he has "made his peace & would no further roam" (VII, 359).

Throughout the preceding chapters, I have emphasized the great stream of Henry's spiralling journey as cycles of death and rebirth. Salvation, the end of this sort of pagan mystery cycle need not be explained, for in an ever-moving cycle which ends in rebirth, "salvation" is a way of saying we admire the beauty of the flower. For all of his yearning, like Dante's desire "to know just how our image merges/into that circle," Henry's aim is not a system that will be intellectually consistent or explainable, but rather, his discovery is to take comfort in a roundness that eases his journeying life and to record glimpses of harmony and love. Henry's spiralling art is life because life moves in spirals; the "ultimate structure" of The Dream Songs is according to his nature" (VII, 293).

III. Love & Fame: "A Certain Explosive Feeling, A Certain  
Administrative Rhythm Set"

Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and  
Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary  
to human existence.

The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom.

"The Marriage of Heaven and Hell"  
William Blake

"To find out what a modern poet has done," Berryman said, with  
Ezra Pound's poetry in mind, "we have to often ask why he did it."<sup>1</sup> We  
have seen most of Berryman's reasons for writing poetry: his desire to  
"feel back"<sup>2</sup> into the past; his desire to "express" his own personality;  
his bent on doing "something no one else could do," and related to that,  
his restlessness in "having done one thing you want to do another"; his  
desire for fame; his desire to "seize an object and make it visible"; his  
sense of accretion, of continuing to develop his and the reader's awareness,  
sympathy, and love; and, finally, the impetus for all his reasons, his  
belief that poetry and life stand in reciprocal relation so that the poet  
and the reader may be re-formed. It is worth recalling Berryman's own  
summary, written about ten years after his essay on Pound, of the complex  
motives for making poetry, which were, I believe, his own motives as well:

The motives for making poetry have regularly been complex and  
beyond analysis: love of the stuff and of rhythm, the need to  
invent, a passion for getting things right, the wish to leave  
one's language in better shape than one found it, a jealousy for  
the national honor, love for person or for God, attachment to  
human possibility, pity, outletting agony or disappointment,  
exasperation, malice, hatred. Desire for fame and the entertaining  
of an audience are only two other motives, forgoable, particularly  
in the consciousness of the final two, which may be more central

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1. Berryman, "The Poetry of Ezra Pound," p.393.
  2. Ibid., p.390.

than any yet mentioned. Poetry is a terminal activity, taking place out near the end of things, where the poet's soul addresses one other soul only, never mind when. And it aims -- never mind either communication or expression -- at the reformation of the poet, as prayer does. In the grand cases -- as, in our century, Yeats and Eliot -- it enables the poet gradually again and again, to become almost another man; but something of that sort happens, on a small scale, a freeing, with the creation of every real poem. 1

Still later, at the height of his fame and creative power, he said to an interviewer for Life magazine: "I would have cut my throat in 1947 [after he had written his Sonnets and The Dispossessed] if I hadn't thought then that I was in the grip of something infinitely beyond my own recognition."<sup>2</sup> If we take Berryman's statement about the motives for making poetry and his creative certainty, a nearly sacred assurance, we might feel that Berryman suffered from an elephantine hubris. But all the evidence, both in Love & Fame and from what Berryman told us about his anxiety before he published it, reveals a nervous uncertainty in his new undertaking. His actions betrayed his bravado; though he had hoped that he might accomplish something "like Yeats's great outburst at the end of his life,"<sup>3</sup> and though he felt that he was "hot as a pistol,"<sup>4</sup> he would say in Love & Fame:

Now my book will go to friends --  
 women & men of wit --  
 Xerox'd before we publish it, it,  
 the limited edition & the public it,  
 before we publish it.

(L. & F., p.80)

and later in an interview, he recalls his insecurity:

I had forty-two poems and was ready to print them, but they were so weird, so unlike all my previous work that I was a little worried. I had encouragement from one or two friends, but still I didn't know what to do. 5

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1. Berryman, "The Revolving Bookstand : From the Middle and Senior Generations," p.386.
  2. Howard, "Whisky and Ink, Whisky and Ink," p.76.
  3. Stitt, "The Art of Poetry : An Interview with John Berryman," p.206.
  4. Heyen, "John Berryman : A Memoir and an Interview," p.51 and p.52. See also Heyen's observation about Berryman's 'constant protesting 'Isn't that good?'," p.49.
  5. Stitt, "The Art of Poetry : An Interview with John Berryman," p.200.

Berryman went on to say that when the Times Literary Supplement printed six of his new poems he was further encouraged. But he still was not sure; so he sent copies to various friends, "looking for reassurance, confirmation, wanting criticism."<sup>1</sup> One of the friends, Richard Wilbur, gave some of the poems "hell," and Berryman said he "adopted almost every suggestion."<sup>2</sup> Other responses were not so reassuring, but negative and "strange" Berryman said:

Edmund Wilson, for whose opinion I have a high regard, found the book hopeless. He said there were some fine lines and striking passages. How do you like that? It is like saying to a beautiful woman, "I like your left small toenail; that's very nice indeed," while she's standing there stark naked looking like Venus. I was deeply hurt by that letter. And then other responses were very strange. Mark Van Doren, my teacher, an old, old friend and a wonderful judge of poetry, also wrote. I forget exactly what he said, but he was very heavy on it. He said things like "original," and "will be influential," and "will be popular," and so on, but "will also be feared and hated." What a surprising letter! It took me days to get used to it, and it took me days even to see what he meant. But now I see what he means. Some of the poems are threatening, very threatening to some readers, no doubt about it. Just as some people find me threatening -- to be in a room with me drives them crazy. And then there is a good deal of obscenity in the poems, too. And there is a grave piety in the last poems, which is going to trouble a lot of people. You know, the country is full of atheists, and they really are going to find themselves threatened by these poems. 3

In short, Berryman was still a follower of Pascal.

Some reviewers were "threatened" by Love & Fame, particularly by what some misjudged as Berryman's "self-aggrandizement" and "immoral callousness."<sup>4</sup> Berryman, always anxious to help explain something in his poetry which might be or had been misunderstood (e.g. his "Note" to The Dispossessed and his prefatory remarks to His Toy, His Dream, His Rest), responded with a second edition of Love & Fame and an afterward in the British and American

1. Ibid., p.201.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Robert Phillips, "Balling the Muse," The North American Review (Winter, 1971), p.72.

editions.<sup>1</sup> Some of the critics' response to Berryman's self-aggrandizement" might have been to the image of the lecherous, frenetic, loud drunk he often could be. But their oversight was reading too much of that image into the poetry; as Berryman said of Pound's personality in his poetry, some critics have heard the personality they "expected to hear, rather than the one that is essentially there."<sup>2</sup> The personality that is essentially there in Love & Fame is as complex, as likeable and unlikeable, as admirable and unadmirable as either Henry in The Dream Songs or as Berryman himself:

Berryman the man is fully as complex and stylish as Berryman the poet. He has enough personal style, in fact, for any dozen of the rest of us. You never know whether to treat him as an august man of letters or as a prankish little boy, because he is always, simultaneously, both. 3

These extremes in Berryman's personality have suggested to William J. Marts an unsatisfying uncertainty, and he objects to Berryman's uncertainty, "both as a man and as an artist":

Our reaction to Love and Fame [sic], and in his later poetry generally, is mixed because his uncertainty carries us into the depths and other times keeps us on the surface of life, and typically does both at once. 4

Mr. Marts seems to feel that these contraries and dovetailing of life and art are weaknesses; I see them as strengths. And further, is it not true that we live from day to day alternating between, and sometimes simultaneously, the surface of "life" and its depths? Berryman's uncertainty is, like his humor, "fatal to bardic pretension" (L. & F., p.19), but a sense of uncertainty

1. As I have noted, I am using the British edition of Love & Fame. The poems Berryman left out of the British and American 2nd edition are as follows: in Part Two, "Thank you Christine," "A Letter," and "To B. . . . E . . . ."; in Part Three, "The Soviet Union," "The Minnesota 8 and the Letter Writers," and "Regents' Professor Berryman's Crack on Race." Several of the poems Berryman retained in these later editions are revised in punctuation and phrasing, but not extensively. See Ernest C. Stefanik, Jr. John Berryman: A Descriptive Bibliography (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1974), pp. 111-126.
2. Berryman, "The Poetry of Ezra Pound," p.39.
3. Howard, "Whisky and Ink, Whisky and Ink," p.70.
4. William J. Marts, "John Berryman," Seven American Poets: from MacLeish to Nemerov, p.208.

is also faithful to the "life we all lead." His uncertainty animates a human man, a man not so aloof from life that he is refined somewhere out of existence, in Joyce's phrase, "paring his fingernails." Berryman still encounters and enacts "the hateful seige of contraries," and he survives in Love & Fame, as Henry does, through a "negative capability." Other themes in Love & Fame, alternating between certainty and uncertainty, are familiar: courage, kindness, art, friendship, sympathy, love, individual responsibility, fear of failure (or worse, "insignificance"), needs. What is different in Love & Fame is Berryman's acceptance of and solace in accepting that God intervenes in the lives of men, though he must rely upon his "negative capability" in understanding why this is. In The Dream Songs Henry questions God's love: God asks for so much when he "calls for this kind of love from his creatures-O./Perhaps God ought to be curbed" (The D.S. VI, 238), Henry says. But he cannot avoid God; he simply leaves matters "in the Hands above" (The D.S. VII, 279). In Love & Fame, Berryman still leaves matters "in the Hands above," but he sees God as more active than passive: God is a God of "rescue" (Pascal and Augustine's view); God actively and wisely oversees men's lives -- "You attend, I feel, to the matters of men" (L. & F., p.87). Berryman always needed his heroes, but he accepted God as the ultimate Sponsor and Overlord.

So we find a complex personality in Love & Fame, but the same sort of unifying consciousness that holds The Dream Songs together. Unlike our knowledge of and experience with Henry, we are given a much briefer, ostensibly even simplified, account of the life of John Berryman (I shall discuss later in greater depth the autobiographical aspect of Love & Fame). Whereas we get to know Henry as a sort of novel-like character, we must make the most out of the "facts" and anecdotes in Love & Fame if we are to "know" John Berryman, at once a distancing and an intimacy, and, as our experience tells us about truly knowing any person, we must work at it. In part, we may find it difficult to accommodate an inconsistent tone in such a short

volume ("some fine lines" and "striking passages," Edmund Wilson said, but "hopeless" otherwise). Berryman said that "some of the poems are quite slight and others are very ambitious,"<sup>1</sup> but the same is true in the ambitious poems, a mixture of slightness and grandness, a mixture of seriousness and "humour fatal to bardic pretension" (L. & F., p.19). We may accept an inconsistency of tone in The Dream Songs because the poem is long enough to accommodate sharp angles; we sense more texture than bristles. So how does Berryman manage to give "life" to his personality in Love & Fame? The answer, I believe, may be found in what he said about the first poem "Her & It" (originally entitled "Love & Fame"<sup>2</sup>) which he described as having "a certain explosive feeling" (L. & F., p.96). Berryman also said that when he wrote the first line, "I fell in love with a girl," he thought, "God damn it, that is a fact."<sup>3</sup> But we may still ask, where is the explosive feeling?

Now the critic must have a strong sense of fact, as Eliot has said, and so must the poet but to a less literal and passive degree. Facts are to the poet a means to an end, the end being the creation of a sense of life, both intellectual and emotional. When Henry, who has become famous, fills out yet another form for a "directory," similar to Who's Who, he objects to being asked to merely list "jobs, awards, books." He feels that this is absurd as an actual autobiography because something of the real person is missing (we recall that Henry also objects to Yeats's symbolic Casement poems which ignore the personal struggle of the man): "Where is childhood," Henry asks, "from which he [Henry] recovered, & where are the moments of love?" (The D.S. VII, 343). These feelings about one's human and personal life spill over into, indeed are the very source, of, Love & Fame. It is as though Berryman decided to create his own "form"

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1. Stitt, "The Art of Poetry: An Interview with John Berryman," p.201.
  2. Berg, "An Interview with John Berryman," p.15.
  3. Stitt, "The Art of Poetry: An Interview with John Berryman," p.200.

for a more personal and vital Who's Who. As Berryman says in his dedicatory poem to Tristan Corbière, Love & Fame is a "mockery of presentations great"; we find instead "self-revelations" which "constitute" a "cursing glory" (L. & F., p.7). Unlike The Dream Songs, however, Love & Fame is more a revelation of conscious, rather than unconscious, remembrance. It would be inaccurate, however, to say that Berryman merely gave us the conscious facts, for nearly every fact swells and teems into something more than a calculating consciousness. Gone is the dramatic dialogue between Henry and his friend, but the essence of drama is still there, that quality of "a fight in the streets" that Keats saw as the basis of drama.<sup>1</sup> Love & Fame is, as Berryman said, "a general inquiry" into the facts, but the life-giving tension between the facts and experience is the real force of the volume, the two (and more) "overmatched grabs in an ambitious young man: one for girls, one for poetry... [which] fights itself out."<sup>2</sup>

We may appreciate that during the time Berryman wrote Love & Fame he was drinking heavily and that he was, nevertheless, beginning to make a concerted but tortuous effort to overcome his alcoholism. It would appear that Love & Fame was "said for use,"<sup>3</sup> as Berryman observed of Stephen Crane's poetry. We might be tempted to say with Douglas Dunn that Berryman was "tricked" by his "emergencies,"<sup>4</sup> or that Berryman felt his poetry so keenly that he thought he was communicating the life of and in his poetry.<sup>5</sup> There

1. For a variation of this principle see Jonathan Galassi's "John Berryman: Sorrows and Passions of His Majesty the Ego" Poetry Notion, II (1974), 119-20. Galassi says, "the poet [John Berryman] establishes a tension in the poem between the narrator and a contrasting but related persona which allows him to set up a kind of conversation with himself, in which an unbridled, maniacal self is moderated and usually controlled by a projected, idealised 'other', who acts, like the girls of the Love & Fame poems, as a soundingboard, but also as an objectifying standard on which the reader can depend as representing the reality principle to some degree."
2. Heyen, "John Berryman: A Memoir and an Interview," p.65.
3. Berryman, Stephen Crane, p.273.
4. Dunn, "Gaiety & Lamentation," p.77.
5. Samuel Hazo gives the following account of Berryman's reading Love & Fame: "With Berryman, who was not a gifted reader as readers go, the audience realized that his words were coming from his racked soul. The reading was somehow his very life happening right there at that particular moment, and happening tragically." "The Death of John Berryman," Commonweal, (February 25, 1972), 489.

is something in these views of Berryman's "emergencies." Among the "twelve steps" for treatment of an alcoholic, suggested by "Alcoholics Anonymous," we find facts, "inventories" and "lists" as an important part of his therapy:

- Step Four: "Made a searching and fearless inventory of ourselves."  
 Step Eight: "Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all."  
 Step Ten: "Continued to take a personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it." 1

Certainly the notion of writing, Henry says, "as short as you can/in order, of what matters" (The D.S. II, 54), had been a part of Berryman's thinking for some time. Love & Fame is a "new priority list" (L. & F., p.76); Berryman is attempting to say "with precision everything that most matters" (L. & F., p.83). Brevity and precision are desirable standards for poetry, but brevity may undercut the sense of texture of the "life we all lead." I would suggest that what Berryman lost in brevity, he gained in "a certain explosive feeling," which creates the texture of a complex life.

We may see this explosive feeling in several ways. First, let us compare and contrast Berryman's own prose and poetic accounts of the same experience which happened at Columbia University in about 1936:

A word about that flunked course. It was Mark Van Doren's Eighteenth Century. I wrote an excellent final, but because Mark and I were already very friendly I put a note at the end saying that of the forty-two books in the course I had read only seventeen. He wrote a note below mine saying how well he liked the exam and my candor, but he would have to flunk me in view of my admission. This was a heavy blow to me in many ways, most in the feeling that I had let him down. So I sat down for some months reading all forty-two books in the course and keeping a notebook on them that ran several hundred pages, including a thirty-page digest of Locke's Essay, which Mark said later ought to be published, only we found that someone else had done one. Anyway, at last one day I handed him the vast manuscript, hoping that it would repair the friendship. To my amazed delight, it did even more. He was impressed and showed it to the Dean and they agreed to change

1. John Berryman, Recovery (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1973), pp.253-54.

my mark in the course and restore my scholarship and welcome me back to the College. This is not the only time in my life that I have been snatched back from the edge of the abyss....!

Compare this briefer, more direct "poetic" account (which, in the same poem, follows a seemingly unrelated personal event that left Berryman "sore & chagrined"):

It was then I think I flunked my 18th Century

I wrote a strong exam, but since it was Mark a personal friend, I had to add a note saying of the 42 books in the bloody course I'd only read 17.

He liked my candour  
(he wrote) & had enjoyed the exam  
but had no option except to give me F in the course --

costing my scholarship. The Dean was nice  
but thought the College & I should part company  
at least for a term, to give me 'time to think'  
& regroup my forces (if I'd any left).

A jolt. And almost worse, I had let Mark down,  
I set about to fix the second thing.  
I paged the whole century through five monk's months  
keeping an encyclopedic notebook.

I made among other things an abridgement of Locke's Essay  
down to some hundred pages  
preserving all his points & skeleton  
but chopping away superfluous exposition.

Mark thought it ought to be published  
but we found there was one in print already.  
Anyway he changed my grade retroactively & talked to the Dean.

My scholarship was restored, the Prodigal Son  
welcomed with crimson joy.

(L. & F., pp.23-24)

What Berryman said of his abridgement of Locke's Essay applies as well to his poetic account, "preserving all... points & skeleton/but chopping

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1. John Berryman, "Three and a Half Years at Columbia," University on the Heights, ed. Wesley First (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc. 1969), p.53. It may very well be that Berryman's account of his University days spurred him to writing the first two parts of Love & Fame; "Her & It," "The Heroes," and other poems from Parts Two and Three were first published in the TLS, July 16, 1970. Berryman made the most of this essay: apart from using it as grist for some of the poems in Love & Fame, some of it appears in Recovery (pp. 203-205) (pp.54-56 in "Three and a Half Years at Columbia").

away superfluous exposition" (L. & F., p.24). Some of the facts of each account are contradictory; for example, he says in the prose account that his abridgement of Locke's Essay was thirty pages, in the other he says it was "some hundred pages." But contradictory facts do not make any difference to the point: Berryman worked hard and he wrote well and perceptively. Generally, the poetic account attempts to give us the poet's feeling rather than simply relating the facts ("It was then I think..."). Perhaps our immediate response to the difference between these accounts is to the rhythm. The prose flows in sentences easily, gently; the poetry is tight, alternating long and short clipped lines. The poetry is heavily iambic ("I wrote a strong exam, but since it was Mark/a personal friend...") whereas, the prose dissipates the rhythm ("I wrote an excellent final, but because Mark and I were already very friendly..."). How much more emphatic is "strong exam" than "excellent final," short syllables and hard sounds emphasize what polysyllables and soft sounds simply state. How much more vivid and accurate in complex feeling and meaning is "I paged the whole century through for five monk's months/keeping an encyclopedic notebook..." than the blander "so I sat down for some months reading all forty-two books in the course and keeping a notebook on them...." Berryman did not feel it necessary to mention in his poetic account the fact that he had read all forty-two books; the fact is irrelevant, the feeling is more important, which is what the poetic account should do. The last poetic line is nicely balanced but at the same time set in tension with the middle of the line: at <sup>the</sup> front end, the suggestive verb "paged" (i.e. to write down on a page, to leaf through pages, and to call out to) and at the other, "five monk's months," a sharp image suggesting his dedication and "devotion," as in one of the Keats epigraph to His Toy, His Dream, His Rest: "I am pickt up and sorted to a pip. My imagination is a monastery and I am its monk." In between, the line is not so vivid, "the whole century through";

thus, the resultant feeling in the whole line is one of fluctuation -- burst, rest, burst.<sup>1</sup> The overall strength of the poetic account is one of immediacy and strong feeling, paced and timed to emphasize a line like "A jolt. And almost worse, I had let Mark down" (compare, "This was a heavy blow for me in many ways, most in the feeling I had let him Van Doren down").

Similar to the sudden bursts in phrasing and style is Berryman's use of imagery. On the whole imagery and metaphor are noticeably absent from Love & Fame, but when an image appears it serves rather than decorates and is set in tension with the more prosaic, as in several of the "Eleven Addresses to the Lord":

Who am I worthless that You spent such pains  
and take my pains again?  
I do not understand; but I believe.  
Jonquils respond with wit to the teasing breeze.

(L. & F., p.91)

Caretaker! take care, for we run in straits.  
Daily, by night, we walk naked to storm,  
some threat of wholesale loss, to ruinous fear.  
Gift us with long cloaks & adrenalin.

(L. & F., p.87)

Yours is the crumpling, to my sister-in-law terrifying  
thunder,  
yours the candelabra buds sticky in Spring....

(L. & F., p.85)

To take the first example, the first three lines are fairly straightforward statements; except for the packed phrase "take my pains again," the sense is very clear. Then the fourth line, puzzling, but vivid. The image appeals to our senses; the poet's mind does not understand his belief; he is like a natural flower responding to a greater force. This is not a decorous nature image; we see within the line a quick burst and on each side calm.

1. I am taking this principle from Berryman's account of "transparent" writing, which I shall discuss later.

"Jonquils respond" and "teasing breeze" are fine but common phrases; we do not expect "with wit" to hold them together. Even in the prosey first line the same undulation is created syntactically, so that in the center of the line the word "worthless" stands out.

This method of explosive juxtaposition is clearly the controlling method throughout Love & Fame. Sometimes style and syntax, sometimes image and metaphor, sometimes a painful irony as in the following example where the realistic horrors of the impending war are juxtaposed to the escapist world of movies:

Anti-semitism through the purblind Houses,  
 News weird out of Germany.  
 Our envy for any visitor to the Soviet Union.  
 The shaking incredible transcripts of the Trials.

Cagney's inventions in gesture, the soul-kiss  
 in 42nd Street. Coop's little-boy-ness.  
 Chaplin emerging nochalant from under the tarpeulin.  
 Five Dietrich films in a day.

(L. & F., p.29)

Finally, there is a "certain explosive feeling" in Berryman's allusions, both those in his private experience and historical knowledge. Some readers object to Berryman's "privateness" and "learnedness," but if we allow his allusions, we will see just how apt they are and how they give depth of feeling and experience. In my previous example of Berryman's prose and poetic accounts of his failing a course, we recall that when he had completed his "five monk's months" study, his scholarship was restored. In the prose account he says, in a cliché, "This is not the first time in my life that I have been snatched back from an abyss..."; the poetic account is sharper and richer in the allusion: "the Prodigal Son/welcomed with crimson joy" (L. & F., p.24). Another example of a private/historical allusion is found in Berryman's account of being "friendless" at Cambridge. His only friend at the time introduced him to the music of Peter Warlock, "who had just knocked himself off, fearing the return/of his other personality, Philip Hesaltine" (L. & F., p.49). Kevin Barry has suggested that Berryman

is not simply name-dropping; though Berryman gives us an historical fact, a more private, unconscious association underlies his mentioning Warlock, as Barry has noted:

The life of that double personality Peter Warlock/Philip Heseltine, has numerous features in common with Berryman's own life -- both held two surnames, Berryman's dead father's name being Smith; both projected alter-personalities to do battle with the world; accredited their beads with a quite inscrutable power; both drank heavily...; both committed suicide. 1

Besides this personal parallel between Berryman and Warlock, Barry draws another parallel, that of Warlock's music and Berryman's poetry. He cites a description of Warlock's music which appeared in Scrutiny in 1937 (while Berryman was at Cambridge) and which could be taken as a description of Berryman's style in The Dream Songs and earlier. Warlock, according to Scrutiny, "re-interpreted the Elizabethan art-song and the English folk-song... in purely modern terms," and

Whereas the technique of the 'Elizabethan' or folksy song is comparatively straightforward and diatonic, here [in Warlock's music] the melodic lines are twisted and contorted. 2

Berryman's historical allusions in Love & Fame are often as illuminating. We recall that in The Dream Songs his songs are his daughters; in Love & Fame he refers to Plato's notion of lustful men's desires as being a frustrated desire for procreation. Berryman remakes the concept so that his own desires are not only sexual but also expressions of desiring children-poems:

Plato's uterus, I say,  
an animal passionately longing for children

and, if long unsatisfied after puberty,  
prone to range angrily, blocking the air passages  
& causing distress & disease. 3

For 'children' read: big fat fresh original &  
characteristic poems.

(L. & F., p.25)

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1. Kevin Barry, "Berryman's Other Cambridge," Cambridge Review, Vol.95 (May 31, 1974), 149.
  2. Ibid., p.149.
  3. Some of the words are taken verbatim from Plato's account. See The Collected Dialogues of Plato, eds. Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p.1210.

William Heyen has remarked that Love & Fame and Delusions, Etc. were "received with general suspicion and dislike," and that because "their sounds are odd" we must catch up and "tune up to them."<sup>1</sup> These later poems are deceptively chatty and cunningly simple, but when we see each poem, and in some cases each line, as "a certain explosive feeling" and when we see the whole set in motion as a "rhythm set," then we begin to understand that Berryman was still touching "the means whereby we come to life," the life of certainty and uncertainty we all lead.

### III. i. Autobiography and Identity

Give me this credit -- Do you not think I strive -- to  
know myself?

John Keats

Though the style and method of Love & Fame is to chop "away superfluous exposition" (L. & F., p.24), clearly a chronology informs its ordering. To date the events in any one poem is impossible, but Berryman does indicate that the first two parts are set in a particular time:

Impressions, structures, tales from Columbia in the Thirties  
& Michaelmas term at Cambridge in '36  
followed by some later.

(L. & F., p.61)

Since Berryman's intention was to set down a "new priority list" (L. & F., p.76) of "everything that matters most" (L. & F., p.83), to himself at least, large parts of Berryman's everyday life are left out. But Love & Fame should be regarded as something more than "the frantic data of life-achievement" (L. & F., p.96) or even the frenetic data of a sexual athlete. Love & Fame might appear to be simply a matter of Berryman's getting priorities straight,

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1. Heyen, "John Berryman: A Memoir and an Interview," p.49.

but we find diverse means and ends in his doing so: it is a matter of his seeing himself as others see him, a matter of his attempting to bring into focus what makes up and how he has formed his sense of identity, a matter of making a list of persons he has harmed so that he might begin to make amends, and a matter of his attempt to continue to improve intellectually, morally, and emotionally.

Berryman said that most of the poems in Love & Fame were autobiographical, "based on the historical personality of the poet."<sup>1</sup> "By historical," he explained, "I mean existing in time and space, occupying quanta."<sup>2</sup> But obviously Berryman wanted more than a retrospective history; he felt that poetry is "the expression of emotion in action. With data. That's all poetry is about...."<sup>3</sup> Clearly the "data" of the personality which occupies time and space is meant to burst, like his new style, into the expression of emotion, so that we may approach Love & Fame first through its data, and then see how that data reveals John Berryman's personality, expresses his emotion in action, and reveals an inner life. In The Dream Songs Berryman explored the inner life of Henry; in Love & Fame he relies more upon external events to reflect an inner life. Berryman's fragmentary autobiography begins at Columbia University in the Thirties, and if we take the actual dates that Berryman attended Columbia, it would be September 1932 to June 1936. Part Two, as Berryman tells us, takes place during the Michaelmas term at Cambridge in 1936. Parts Three and Four are "some later"; we may conjecture that he means from 1936 to 1970 when Love & Fame was published.

"Autobiography means," Roy Pascal says in his authoritative book Design and Truth in Autobiography, "... discrimination and selection in face of the endless complexity of life, selection of facts, distribution of

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1. Stitt, "The Art of Poetry: An Interview with John Berryman," p.199.
  2. Ibid.
  3. Heyen, "John Berryman: A Memoir and an Interview," p.57.

emphases, choice of expression.<sup>1</sup> The obvious questions any autobiographer faces are which facts, what emphases, what expression accurately and fully reveal, as well as bring to life, the person writing. One must begin with the realization that to reconstruct one's life is an impossible task; what the autobiographer must do is to give a vital sense of his life. Pascal distinguishes between autobiography and a "philosophical reflection on the self." Philosophical reflection is a "static analysis," a "self-portrait" which is a "static representation of personality"; the autobiography should be more dynamic,

historical in method, and at the same time the representation of the self in and through its relations with the outer world. Perhaps one might say that it involves the philosophical assumption that the self comes into being only through interplay with the outer world. 2

So it is interplay, a rhythm of relationships and experiences in time, with which Berryman is concerned in Love & Fame and in that sense it is autobiographical. All autobiographers must begin with something like Yeats's, though perhaps with more care for detail, admission in writing his autobiography that the memory may not be relied upon for truth: "I have changed nothing to my knowledge and yet it must be that I have changed many things without my knowledge; for I am writing after many years and have consulted neither friend, nor letter, nor old newspaper, and describe what comes oftenest into my memory."<sup>3</sup> Marjorie Perloff has observed of Yeats's disclaimer: "This statement is not exactly candid: what Yeats means is that he does not wish his autobiography to be tested against the 'actual facts' as other people might see them."<sup>4</sup> Similarly Berryman does not wish to be held accountable for the "actual facts" in Love & Fame: when he recalls his having failed his Eighteenth Century literature examination, he says,

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1. Roy Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1960), p.10.
  2. Ibid., p.8.
  3. W.B. Yeats, Autobiographies (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1966), p.3.
  4. Marjorie Perloff, "The Tradition of Myself": The Autobiographical Mode of Yeats," Journal of Modern Literature, IV (February 1975), p.536.

"It was then I think I flunked my 18th Century..." (L. & F., p.23), and later, "I spent a lot of money, not being used to money, /I forget on what now!" (L. & F., p.38), and finally in his "addresses" to the Lord he says "I fail much to remember" (L. & F., p.92), and again, "Thou art not absent minded, as I am" (L. & F., p.87). Yeats also said in his Reveries, as Marjorie Perloff notes, "It seems as if time had not been created, for all thoughts are connected with emotion and place without sequence."<sup>1</sup> While all references to time in Yeats's Autobiographies are "purposely vague and blurred" Perloff says, "those to place and person are specific and concrete."<sup>2</sup> Berryman does the same: places are named and often described in striking detail, for example the bridge between his dormitory and Clare College Cambridge:

Tom Grumbold's bridge has balusters set diagonally  
('subtle & very effective')  
& a pie-slice of granite is gone from one  
globe, -- God knows how, --  
upon this exquisite famous by-me-crossed-  
six-times-daily bridge.

(L. & F., p.47)

And some friends are concretely described:

My intense friend was tall & strongly made,  
almost too handsome....

(L. & F., p.18)

Even his heroes' works are sharply and accurately, nearly physically, described, as in this appraisal of Ezra Pound and W.B. Yeats:

For all his vehemence & hydraulic opinions  
Pound seemed feline, zeroing in on feelings,  
hovering up to them, putting his tongue in their ear,  
delicately modulating them in & out of each other.

Almost supernatural crafter; maybe unhappy  
disappointed continually,  
not fated like his protégé Tom or drunk Jim  
or hard-headed Willie for imperial sway.

(L. & F., p.34)

1. Ibid., p. 39.

2. Ibid.

Persons and places are seen in relation to Berryman himself; they are not isolated facts but living "facts" interacting with the man. This is important to remember, for one's sense of identity is made up on one's relationships, an individual view of and feeling towards the outer world. Though these relations may be blurred by the lapse of time and memory, their temporal displacement is of little matter because they make up the present identity; as Henry says,

the wind blows hard from our past into our future  
and we are that wind, except the wind's nature  
was not to last.

(The D.S. VII, 282)

Despite the chronological progression in Love & Fame, Berryman's experiences cannot be placed exactly in time because those experiences, in various degrees, still live within him. Marjorie Perloff has made the same observation of Yeats's sense of the "immeasurable lapse of time" in Yeats's Autobiographies; such words as "presently," "now," "began" and such recurring phrases as, "sometimes I would....," "One day I met....," "Once when I was going...., /etc."<sup>1</sup> displace temporally the events and this is because Yeats was more concerned about his present identity. Berryman's sense of temporal displacement is recorded similarly. When he relates a past event, the present often intrudes; the word "now" for example is often set against the past (my italics throughout): "I fell in love with a girl" shifts in time to "It's not now near at all the end of winter" (L. & F., p.13); "The Isolation so, young & now I find older... (L. & F., p.25); a whole poem relating an experience which took place in the past is emphasized with "Now we're swinging round... (L. & F., p.43); "I will say: I have been wrong.... I go now this far..." (L. & F., p.66). The word "now" brings the past into the living present, but it also projects into the future; when Berryman says that he has finished Love & Fame, he emphasizes, in his own italics, "Now my book will go to friends..." (L. & F., p.80).

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1. Ibid.

The meaning of the individual's past, present, and future, broadly speaking, is the real theme of Love & Fame. But Berryman's attempt to come to terms with the meaning of time is not that of Eliot's philosophical inquiry (though their ultimate concern is the same, an attempt to relate the timeless with time). Berryman's inquiry is a matter of letting the past, present, and future "fight it out," and in part he does so by giving us "data" related in consistently shifting tenses from line to line, stanza to stanza, poem to poem, part to part with the effect of a life suspended in time. Berryman makes several references to photographs, significantly, because he would wish to call up the past as a frozen moment: "wishing I could lay my hands somewhere on those snapshots" (L. & F., p.20). But his verb tenses undercut any sense of stopping time.

Part One is most often related in the past tense with a few present tense interpolations. Part Two opens with the entire first poem related in the present tense which gives us a strong sense of the presentness of the past. In the next five poems past experience is related, for the most part, in the present tense until we come to the poems "Monkhood" and "Views of Myself," which shift to the past tense. Surely there is method in this; by telling about past experience in the present tense Berryman is saying in effect that the past makes up the present "Views of Myself" so that when we come to such a self estimate we are subtly reminded of the past which makes up the present self, the presentness of the past.

The first half of "Monkhood" is told in the present tense and begins, "I don't show my work to anybody, I am quite alone" (L. & F., p.50). He continues in the present tense until we come to a break in the poem, three asterisks placed between the fifth and sixth stanzas, and the sixth stanza begins, "I never went to see Wittgenstein or Broad... (L. & F., p.50), and the poem continues in the past tense. But then another shift in tense, to the future, comes in the final stanza:

Will I ever write properly, with passion & exactness,  
of the damned strange demeanors of my flagrant heart?  
& be by anyone anywhere undertaken?  
one more unanswerable question.

(L. & F., p.51)

In view of the blocks of past tense and present tense, the future tense here is intentionally ambiguous; in effect, Berryman is saying, "I could neither answer questions in the past nor can I answer them in the present." After the shift from the present tense to the past tense in "Monkhood" the remaining four poems are related, with several exceptions, in the past tense.

The first poem of Part Three is in the past tense; thereafter no one poem settles entirely into the present, past, or future tenses, the implication being that all time is fused in the personality of the individual. When we consider that Part Four is addressed to God, then we begin to understand why Berryman has been so calculating in his use of tenses, for he finally comes to the relation between time and the timeless. Told mainly in the present tense, with some references to his personal and the historical past, these addresses are meant to be an expression of hope for an intersection of time with the timeless future; thus, the last address ends: "I pray I may be ready with my witness" (L. & F., p.94). Berryman's preoccupation with time is not apparent until we look at his verb tenses, but once we see their complex rhythms, we may understand why Berryman said,

I am not writing an autobiography-in-verse my friends.

....

It's not my life.

That's occluded & lost.

(L. & F., p.61)

Berryman's life, indeed all lives, are occluded and lost in time.

Nevertheless, Berryman is writing in time, present time. When he says that he is not writing "autobiography-in-verse," we may believe him partly because his "autobiography" is extremely patchy, but mainly because he is writing to know himself and in attempting to know himself he sees only

those few experiences which he feels will enable him to understand himself. His strategy is not to aim at veresimilitude; he does not ask the reader to be convinced that he can or is trying to reconstruct his past life. What he is asking of the reader is what Keats said in one of his Letters, "Give me this credit -- do you not think I strive -- to know myself?"<sup>1</sup>

So Love & Fame is Berryman's further and most overt attempt to know himself, an inventory of the whole personality. Love & Fame is what Roy Pascal would call an "autobiographical writing":

There are many autobiographies that limit themselves to one particular experience or group of experiences that bare the core of the personality, like Saint Exupéry's volumes. To this category belong many books of travel, books of spiritual experience in war, and so on. They are not usually called autobiographies, and I prefer the term "autobiographical writings." For one seems to expect from autobiography a totality rather than a quintessence; and even if such an experience gives the personality a new dimension, a turn, the autobiography must embed it in a long process. 2

John Berryman's personality, a "human American man" (The D.S. I, 13), as Henry says of himself, in Love & Fame is a series of new dimensions and turns; what Berryman loses in not giving us a long process he gains in suggesting the spontaneity and unpredictability of experience and in that sense Love & Fame is autobiography. "Every experience," Pascal says of a good autobiography, "is a nucleus from which energies radiate in various directions."<sup>3</sup> Berryman gives us nuclei of energy, bursts, both of style and experience, so that his life is not just facts but, in Pascal's phrase, "facts-in-the-making."<sup>4</sup> Berryman avoids the "original sin" of autobiographers (of either true autobiography or "autobiographical writings") in that he gives us a sense of life happening, unfolding, radiating with possibilities, a life of "Uncertainties, presentiments" (L. & F., p.30). He was not attempting

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1. Forman, ed. Letters, p.317.
  2. Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography, p.12.
  3. Ibid., p.17.
  4. Ibid., p.16.

to match an "Oxbridge wealth of folklore" (L. & F., p.53), nor was he merely collecting "anecdotes" which were "inspired by Aubrey" (L. & F., p.47), he was writing his own "Brief Life" like John Aubrey's Brief Lives (Berryman mentions Aubrey twice p.32, p.47). Like Augustine in his Confessions, Berryman "re-collects" (Augustine's word) the "scattered pieces of his personality," so that we get "not a portrait, but a movement in perspective."<sup>1</sup> But unlike Augustine's assumption that all of his past life was designed to lead him back to God, Berryman leaves an extremely large gap between his past life and his present "conversion." We know simply that he was converted and that God "rescued" him, but God must do so "again and again." Berryman never ascribes his "confusion & afflictions" (L. & F., p.89) to God as His design; he says simply that God "opened his eyes" (L. & F., p.89):

I fell back in love with you, Father, for two reasons:  
You were good to me, & a delicious author,  
rational & passionate.

(L. & F., p.93)

Berryman does, however, look back on his past life with the advantage of a wiser perspective. From time to time we are made aware of his present wisdom and maturity; the "distastful Braggart" (L. & F., p.95) of the past is viewed ironically. He speaks of his "then romantic image" (L. & F., p.16) or of his "phantasy... at twenty" (L. & F., p.26). He recalls what Delmore Schwartz said of his "'<sup>a</sup>Stanic pride'" (L. & F., p.51), or what some one else called his "'bloody-mindedness'" (L. & F., p.52), but he never points out to the reader that he has overcome his pride, he says only that he stands "ashamed" of himself and that the reader must "take my vices alike/with some virtues" (L. & F., p.52). But his actions indicate that at the time he is writing Love & Fame, he has, as someone observes of Henry, acquired "a degree of gentleness" (The D.S. VII, 350) and humility.

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1. Ibid., p.22-23.

He still bristles when he is insulted (L. & F., p.76), but when someone treats him with kindness, he responds with kindness (unlike in his youth: "I treated my girl slight/who was so kind to me" [L. & F., p.187]). While Berryman is in hospital, "Mrs. Massey," a woman "long widowed, long retired, toothpick-thin" (who, one assumes, does volunteer work) stops at his dinner table and whispers:

'Mr. Berryman, was everything all right?'  
 Tonight though she touched my elbow afterward  
 as I was bearing my cleared tray to the rack:  
 'It gives me honour to serve a man like you,  
 would you sometime write me a verse or two & sign it?'  
 O my brave dear lady, yes I will.  
 This is it.  
 I certainly will miss at 6:25 p.m. you.  
 And if you can carry on so, so maybe can I.

(L. & F., p.77)

Berryman might be writing from a wiser perspective, but the reader is given a sense of Berryman's awareness and self-revelation unfolding and happening spontaneously in a continuing process till his death. His desire to "improve" his mind is his preoccupation in his youth but as he matures he desires more to improve his relationships. Even when he would assert humane truth, he is not sure, and he qualifies it with "I suppose" or "seems":

The thing meanwhile, I suppose, is to be courageous & kind.

(L. & F., p.61)

A basis rock-like of love & friendship  
 for all this world-wide madness seems to be needed.

(L. & F., p.68)

Like his knowledge, his improvement is never complete.

"In autobiography proper," Roy Pascal says, "attention is focused on the self, in the memoir or reminiscence on others."<sup>1</sup> But this is not to say that one's relationships to others and the outside world are not

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1. Ibid., p.5.

important to autobiography; relationships are, in fact, essential to an understanding of one's inner life: "True autobiography can be written only by men and women pledged to their innermost selves,"<sup>1</sup> Pascal observes, but at the same time that innermost self must be "the representation of the self in and through its relations with the outer world."<sup>2</sup>

The individual's sense of identity (see my p.135 ff.) is a complex rhythm of the flow, modulations, and variations of an individual as he relates to others who are significant in his immediate community in historical time. So one's identity may be seen as a medley of encounters with others, what the philosopher John Macmurray calls our "rhythm of withdrawal and return." One begins to form a sense of identity, Macmurray says, as soon as he begins to recognize the self, which is recognizing one's own spiritual and physical person as contrasted with other persons, and this recognition leads to an assertion of one's individuality by opposing family and society of which one is a part. When the individual withdraws, he is, nevertheless, compelled to return, though not permanently, so that the rhythms of forming one's identity are never complete:

The rhythm of withdrawal and return does not cease with the achievement of organic maturity; it is the permanent form of the life of a personal relationship. The transition from withdrawal to the return repeats itself indefinitely and each time it is made there is a possibility that it should be made successfully. 3

Berryman's relationships with women in Love & Fame are a good example of a series of attempts to make a relationship more successfully. His is not simply a single drive to take all women to bed, but a slow and singular effort to keep trying until one relationship should be mature and successful, similar to Henry's progress from treating women as sex objects to realizing a mature relationship. The very titles of the poems suggest this rhythmic progression. In Part One a woman is a sex object, "Her & It,"

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., p.8.

3. Macmurray, Persons in Relation, p.105.

and he tells us in another poem that he "feasted" on one woman and with another they "fondled each others' wonders" (L. & F., p.14). The title of another poem in Part One, "In & Out," is a double entendre as is "Two Organs," but by Part Two the sexual connotations of his titles begin to lose their meaning. "Meeting" is straightforward and unambiguous; he meets "a sort of beauty of a queen" at a luncheon party. He admires her at a respectful distance and does not talk with her; when the party breaks up, he does not expect to see her again. But he does ("Cambridge is a small place" L. & F., p.54<sup>7</sup>); he invites her to "Tea," and the title of the poem indicates his formal respect. They talk and seem to get along well:

By six-fifteen she had promised to stop seeing 'the other man'.  
I may have heard better news but I don't know when.  
Then -- I think -- then I stood up, & we kissed.

She skipped dinner at Newham.

(L. & F., p.55)

The contrast with "struggling back up in to bra, panties, trousers" (L. & F., p.21) in Part One is apparent; this relationship is more successful and mature.

The three poems Berryman left out of Part Two in both the American second edition and the British edition of Love & Fame are revealing; it would seem that Berryman wanted this meaningful relationship to stand above his previous sexual explorations by having these two poems ("Meeting" and "Tea") end Part Two in his revised edition. The three other poems in his first edition, "Thank You, Christine," "A Letter," and "To B----- E-----," relate even more arrogance and "thirsting & burning lust"<sup>1</sup> than in Part One. Just before his "Meeting" the woman who meant something to him, we find the poem "Thank You, Christine":

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1. John Berryman, Love & Fame (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970), p.52.

Met in a tearoom two steps down in Bridge Street;  
made friends. Pretty soon I asked her back to my rooms.  
As we toppled on my rug  
'I'm menstruating, honey: what's the hurry?'

The hurry was a prepotent erection brought overseas  
needing to be buried in you.... 1

Shifting to the present time, Berryman recalls: "Once, when low, I made out a list -- it came to 79..."; and Christine "stood third."<sup>2</sup> This self-aggrandizing account, however, ends on a different note: "This might have gone on for months except that something happened."<sup>3</sup> What happened, we learn in the next poem, was he met the "sort of beauty of a queen" (L. & F., p.54). After "Meeting" and "Tea" in the first edition, two other poems depict Berryman as a "sexual athlete,"<sup>4</sup> and the effect is to make his meaningful relationship appear meaningless. By leaving out these three poems in the second edition Berryman has perhaps taken some license with true autobiography, but it would appear that he realized that he had intended to emphasize a relationship which had meant something to him and that he had not done so by telling all. One might argue that Berryman's meaningful relationship did not seem to change him, but surely the point is that finally a woman meant more to him than previously.

One other important poem in Part Two (never deleted) about his personal relationships, is "Views of Myself." In this poem, which is related by an older and wiser Berryman and which was not set in Cambridge at all as the other poems in that Part are, Berryman sees himself as others saw him when he was "hell young" (L. & F., p.52) and "bloody minded":

I did not censor anything I said  
& what I said I said with force & wit  
which crushed some no doubt de-cent & by me now would be spared  
human personalities with shoes on.  
I stand ashamed of myself...

(L. & F., p.52)

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1. Ibid., p.43.
  2. Ibid.
  3. Ibid.
  4. Ibid., p.52.

"Views of Myself" points to the meaning of significant others, and Berryman's more sensitive awareness indicates a truer sense of his identity. In Part Three, in the poem pointedly entitled "Relations," he expresses his sense of "congruity" and "Collegueship" with some of his "fine contemporaries" -- Robert Lowell, Saul Bellow, Elizabeth Bishop and others. His relationships have become more mature and solid, and significantly, the poem before "Relations" expresses his desire to be "courageous and kind" (L. & F., p.61). In the poem which follows "Relations," we learn that Berryman is married, and the solidity of that relationship is expressed in terms of their chairs:

My rocking-chair is dark blue, it's in one corner  
& swivels, at my thought drifts.  
My wife's more expensive patchquilt rocker  
is five feet away & does not swivel. 1

(L. & F., p.63)

But even in this secure and solid relationship the rhythms of withdrawal and return are apparent. Several poems later he says,

I drink too much. My wife threatens separation.  
She won't 'nurse' me. She feels 'inadequate'.  
We don't mix together.

(L. & F., p.68)

And the next stanza suggests his desire to return to another important relationship:

It's an hour later in the East.  
I could call my Mother in Washington, D.C.  
But could she help me?

(L. & F., p.68)

Berryman goes for treatment for his alcoholism (interestingly, he includes no poems about his own treatment, but sympathizes more with the problems of others -- perhaps in the end the best kind of therapy), and he returns home in another "Envoi" poem (the other is Dream Song 171) called "The Home Balled." Berryman is no longer the "tireless & inventive dancing man" (L. & F., p.21) nor does he still regret having not married "a ballerina

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1. Compare this description of his wife's not "swivelling" and her "swively grace" in The Dream Songs (VI, 186).

in London" (L. & F., p.19). His "home ballad" is meant in the sense of the Latin ballare, to dance.<sup>1</sup> In a real sense Berryman's "Home Ballad" is a celebration of a harmonious dance and his return to his wife (no longer an expression of his "dance" with his wife beyond the poem as in "Canto Amor" in The Dispossessed). His "ballad" expresses and enacts his rest: "We must work & play and John Jacob Miles/will sing our souls to rest..." (L. & F., p.79).

Finally, in Part Four Berryman returns to another relationship, his long neglected relationship with God. God too offers a "cosmic home" and His reward is rest as well: "Rest may be your ultimate gift" (L. & F., p.88). Berryman's difficulty in establishing a continuing relationship with God has been, in part, that he cannot "know" God:

Unknowable, as I am unknown to my guinea pigs:  
how can I 'love' you?

(L. & F., p.83)

... even to say You exist is misleading.

(L. & F., p.92)

But he accepts that he cannot "know" God and accepts their "relationship" on faith:

I only as far as gratitude & awe  
confidently & absolutely go.

....

and I believe as fixedly in the Resurrection --  
appearances to Peter and to Paul  
as I believe I sit in this blue chair.  
Only that may have been a special case  
to establish their initiatory faith.

(L. & F., p.83)

Berryman's "blue chair," we recall, swivels with his thought, and that swivelling thought is still a part of his relationship with God. He has "altered" and "for good" to become God's, but he still asks for some of the vision of Isaiah & Pascal: "I dare not ask for that vision, though

1. See Graves, The White Goddess, p.422.

a piece of it..." (L. & F., p.87). Throughout his "Eleven Addresses," the rhythm of withdrawal and return informs Berryman's relationship with God: on the one hand he says, "I fell back in love with you..." (L. & F., p.93), but on the other he says "You have come to my rescue again & again..." (L. & F., p.83).

Berryman's identity is never complete and whole in Love & Fame, but we do have a strong sense of an accretion, of the possibility that each successive relationship has been made more successfully, and as a result his sense of identity inclines toward stability. Love, sympathy, and friendship are always the real source of his forming a sense of identity, not any of these in an abstract, distanced sense, but in a personal sense, within his immediate community. Friends and family are the firm basis of Berryman's view of himself, how he sees himself. His "Sponsors and Overlords," his confrère like Keats, Blake, Wordsworth, Whitman, and Yeats, all of his heroes are Prosperos, "every 'third thought' their death"<sup>1</sup> (L. & F., p.34). Berryman, Prospero-like, manoeuvres them in his mind, elects "that they witness to,/show forth, transfigure: life-suffering & pure heart/& hardly definable but central weaknesses"; all his heroes, in short, are "enthroned & forgiven" by him (L. & F., p.34). But Berryman's hero-worship is not a mindless awe; he sees himself as eventually being among these heroes, not arrogantly, but after serving his apprenticeship, wishing to join their ranks, wishing to be honored as they were, figures of wise and humane authority. His heroes, in Arnold's word, were "touchstones" by which he judged and saw himself, and seeing himself among these heroes had a measurable influence on his own sense of identity and on what happened in his own life and art.

Throughout his poetry, both happily and reluctantly (reluctantly because he knows the cost), he joins Walt Whitman in his self-explorations,

1. From one of Prospero's last speeches: "... thence retire me to Milan where/Every third thought shall be my grave." The Tempest V, i, 310-11.

his "downstairs" of the heart:

Walt! We're downstairs  
even you don't comfort me  
but I join your risk my dear friend & go with you.

(L. & F., p.71)

In Love & Fame, Wordsworth is a confrère in that he too looked back at his past life and asked the same soul-searching questions about his actions and motives and came up with something like Berryman's self-reproach; as

Wordsworth says in The Prelude:

I said unto the life which I had lived  
Where art thou? Hear I not a voice from thee  
Which 'tis reproach to hear?

(XIII, 375-77), 1805

Berryman sees life, like Wordsworth and Whitman, as a flowing process and a progress towards unity and God as in Wordsworth's expression of life's river:

... from its [the river's] progress have we drawn  
The feeling of life endless, the great thought  
By which we live, Infinity and God.

(XIII, 183-185), 1805

Wordsworth, Whitman, and Berryman were supremely "egotistical" in their poetry but at the same time they could say with Whitman, "I know perfectly well my own egotism."<sup>1</sup> This awareness is their saving grace; we find in them self-laud, even self-aggrandizement, but through their awareness of their own self needs (and egotism is a need), they enact in their poetry singular moments of love, singular moments in which love is seen as "the only way out of the lonely reaches of the ego,"<sup>2</sup> as Berryman advised another poet on the subject of poetry. Without the ego there is no real love, only passivity, no real energy through which a relationship may develop. The further saving grace of their egotism is best summarized

1. Whitman, Selected Poems and Prose, p.57.

2. Heyen, "John Berryman: A Memoir and an Interview," p.53.

by Wordsworth in one of his early letters concerning the purpose of his poetry, to "excite profitable sympathies in many kind and good hearts, and may in some small degree enlarge our feelings of reverence for our species and our knowledge of human nature, by showing that our best qualities are possessed by men whom we are too apt to consider, not with reference to the points in which they resemble us, but to those in which they manifestly differ from us."<sup>1</sup> Berryman makes his point just as straightforwardly, not once but several times, in his "Afterword" to Love & Fame. Speaking of the "human" but "distastful Braggart" of his past self, Berryman said:

He is more convincing than he knows: His insecurity about his fame (over-brandishing) matches his insecurity over this 'true' (exposed as false by his repeated infidelity to it) love he is so proud of, and we have pathetic before us an existential man, wishing to be (twice -- cf. title) what is impossible to quicksilver (Luther's word for man's heart) Man. Our affect: recognition and pity for his unhappiness. (my italics).

(L. & F., p.95)

and again,

Memory failing, clutching at frantic data of life-achievement, obsessed with a vanishing past of happiness in his present loneliness & age, he moves us after all. Maybe we too, in the end -- (my italics)

(L. & F., p.96)

And of course there is Keats, the "lovely man" whose Letters, we have seen, are "so obscure, so important" (The D.S. VII, 364) to Berryman. Ernest Stefanik has noted<sup>2</sup> that the ironic title to Love & Fame comes from Keats's first Shakespearean sonnet which first appears in a letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, January 31, 1818; the sonnet ends,

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1. Ernest De Selincourt and Chester L. Shaver, eds. The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, 2nd ed. Vol. 3 (London: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1967), p.315.
  2. Ernest C. Stefanik, Jr., "A Cursing Glory," pp.116-7.

... when I feel, fair creature of an hour,  
 That I shall never look upon thee more  
 Never have relish in the fairy power  
 of unreflecting Love: then on the Shore  
 Of the wide world I stand alone and think  
 Till Love and Fame to Nothingness do sink. -- 1

Though love and fame might be important, even necessary, to a man while he lives, they are as nothing to mortal men, "the fair creature of an hour." Keats would say breathlessly in another letter "that a thing to be in the Mouth of Fame,"<sup>2</sup> but after the Blackwood's attack he settled for his own perception: "... when I feel I am right, no external praise can give me such a glow as my own solitary re-perception & ratification of what is fine."<sup>3</sup> But to the end Keats had very mixed feelings about fame: "'If I should die, said I to myself, 'I have no immortal work behind me -- nothing to make my friends proud of my memory....'"<sup>4</sup> Berryman travelled the same path, wanting fame and yet finally seeing it as sinking to nothingness. He says to his mistress in his Sonnets, "I tarry alike for fame and you" (B.S., 29); but in The Dream Songs Henry (Berryman) says that when he achieved "eminence" he was "dissatisfied with that/and needed more" (The D.S. IV, 90). What he could not find in a famous public image was love,

Do I love? all this applause,  
 young beauties still at my feet and all,  
 and all.  
 It tires me out, he pondered....

(The D.S. V, 118)

Nevertheless fame was necessary to Henry's (Berryman's) sense of identity; fame tells him who he is (The D.S. VI, 152), so that when praise "comes to a stop" he can think, "Yes, that happened" (The D.S. VII, 340). In the end, "The secret is not praise," Henry learns, "It's just being accepted at something like the figure where you put your worth..." (The D.S. VII, 340). Love & Fame is no less "a mockery of the pretensions great" (L. & F., p.7) than The Dream Songs; Christ is the only "literary critic":

1. Forman, ed., Letters, p.94.
2. Forman, ed., Letters, p.26.
3. Forman, ed., Letters, p.222.
4. Forman, ed., Letters, p.468.

Father Hopkins said the only true literary critic is Christ.  
Let me lie down exhausted, content with that.

(L. & F., p.93)

In an interview, Berryman suggested further, quoting Hopkins, "Fame in itself is nothing. The only thing that matters is virtue."<sup>1</sup>

But what about love? Should love sink to "nothingness" as well? In view of Berryman's feeling that love is so important in one's life, how do we reconcile this apparent contradiction? We must recall the opening lines of Keats's sonnet: "When I have fears that I may cease to be/Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain...."<sup>2</sup> Keats is saying that fame and love will sink to nothingness if they have not been achieved before he ceases "to be." Berryman, on the other hand, seems to have achieved "being" in fame and love; but he presses irony further: he suggests that "we have pathetic before us an existential man <sup>wishing to be</sup> (twice -- cf. title) what is impossible to quicksilver (Luther's word for man's heart) Man" (L. & F., p.95). So Berryman is saying in his ironic title not only that love and fame will sink to nothingness because of man's mortality, but also that the true and pure ideals of love and fame are beyond man's capabilities while he lives: "Just one more doomed old fashion type (for all of his paraphernalia of modernity -- flouting morality & national borders, etc.): The Romantic" (L. & F., p.96).

Keats, Wordsworth, and Whitman are familiar Sponsors and Overlords in Berryman's poetry, but some important new ones appear in Love & Fame, several of the Christian martyrs of the Second Century, often called the Apologists: Germanicus, Polycarp, and Justin Martyr, all of whom are mentioned in the "Eleven Addresses to the Lord." These new heroes serve to expand a new dimension of Berryman's changing sense of identity:

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1. Stitt, "The Art of Poetry: An Interview with John Berryman," p.180. For another similar reference to Hopkins, see Berryman's "Lowell, Thomas, & Co.," p.78.
  2. Forman, ed., Letters, p.94.

Now, brooding thro' a history of the early Church,  
I identify with everybody, even the heresiarchs

(L. & F., p.89)

Though Berryman is not truly an apologist (that is, one who writes an apologia, in the case of the Second Century Apologists, a defence of Christianity and an attempt to correct misrepresentation or misunderstandings of Christian faith and life in light of Hellenistic and pagan thought in order to win the tolerance of the Roman civil authorities), he is an apologist, even in so few poems, in the sense of apologetics as a subjective argument of the heart:

Apologetics undertakes not a defense, not even the vindication, but the establishment, not, strictly speaking, of Christianity, but rather that knowledge of God which Christianity professes to embody and seeks to make efficient in the world, and which it is the business of theology scientifically to explicate. 1

The business of apologetics is to establish the truth of Christianity as the absolute religion directly only as a whole, and in its detail only indirectly. 2

As a Catholic (Berryman said that he did not consider himself to be a "Christian": "I consider myself," he said "a Catholic..."<sup>3</sup>; he probably meant that he had not managed to live a properly Christian life, but was loyal to the Roman Catholic Church ), perhaps he saw himself more as a "practical apologist" who, as G.K. Malone has said in the New Catholic Encyclopedia, would be mindful of Catholic teaching:

In his search for vital, meaningful, and relevant ways of presenting the motives of credibility, the practical apologist is ever mindful of Catholic teaching that faith is truly the work of God, that no man can come to Christ unless he be drawn unto Him. On the purely natural level he understands that one will not believe unless one wishes to believe. He thus realizes most clearly that he cannot force a man by purely logical reasons to place an act of supernatural faith, anymore than Christ Himself could do so by making claims and actually provoking them by miracles. His, in short, remains the task of offering the rational foundation for a supernatural, super-rational edifice. 4

1. Samuel Macauley Jackson, et al., The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1966), p.233.
2. Ibid., p.234.
3. Stitt, "The Art of Poetry: An Interview with John Berryman," p.205.
4. G.K. Malone, "Apologetics," New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol.1, eds. William J. MacDonald, et al. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1967), p.677.

Berryman's "apologetics" in "Eleven Addresses to the Lord," is, thus, a presentation, an argument of "an act of supernatural faith," a subjective and a "rational foundation for a supernatural, superrational edifice."

Berryman makes his "addresses" to the Lord in several senses: in the ordinary sense of directing a message; in the sense of a skillful readiness and manner; and in the sense of a formal discourse, though not quite, delivered to an audience. If we may regard The Dream Songs as "natural supernaturalism," in M.H. Abrams's use of the term ("... the secularization of inherited theological ideas and ways of thinking"<sup>1</sup>), then Love & Fame is a journey towards the supernatural, a journey away from secularization.

Related to Berryman's laying his "rational foundation" is his "defence" of Christianity. Traditionally, apologists were not attempting to vindicate Christianity, but the Second Century Apologists found themselves in the position of not only explaining but also defending Christianity, and Berryman seems to have felt he was writing in similar circumstances. We recall Berryman's account of one of Mark Van Doren's responses to Love & Fame (it would be "feared and hated"), and Berryman's conjecture that part of what Van Doren meant was the adverse response because of "the grave piety in the last poems...." ("You know, the country is full of atheists, and they really are going to find themselves threatened by those poems."<sup>2</sup>) "Eleven Addresses" as a "defence" should be considered a minor motivation for Berryman's writing them; his addresses were said for personal (but not private) use.

Berryman identified with the Apologists in Love & Fame for other, more important, reasons. His faith is an "initiatory faith" (L. & F., p.83); he can only believe in Christ's resurrection appearances. He is in the first stages of his real faith, attempting to reconcile his life before Christ which

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1. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, p.12.

2. Stitt, "The Art of Poetry: An Interview with John Berryman," p.201.

has included a careful study of Plato (L. & F., p.25) and after Christ, just as the Apologists, particularly Justin Martyr, attempted to make Greek thought before Christ compatible with His new teaching. Justin argued that the pre-Christians were governed by divine reason, and he linked together, as Berryman says, "a Stoic, a Peripatetic, a Pythagorean" with "the words of the Saviour" (L. & F., p.90). Justin based his argument on the concept of "Logos" (Word, Reason, Christ), and he said that because the ancients, and the barbarians (i.e. non-Greeks) as well, were able to reason, they "knew" Christ. When the Christians were charged with atheism and the instigation of demons, Justin Martyr argued their position:

... when Socrates endeavoured, by true reason and examination, to... deliver men from the demons, then the demons themselves, by means of men who rejoiced in iniquity, compassed his death, as an atheist and a profane person, on the charge that "he was introducing new divinities"; and in our case they display a similar activity. For not only among Greeks did reason (Logos) prevail to condemn these things through Socrates, but also among the Barbarians were they condemned by Reason (or the Word, the Logos) Himself, who took shape, and became man, and was called Jesus Christ.... 1

Thus, Justin concluded, Christ "is the Word of whom every race of men are partakers; and those who lived with reason are Christians...."<sup>2</sup>

I am not suggesting that Berryman in his "Eleven Addresses" is championing Justin's idea of Logos, but there is much to suggest throughout Love & Fame that he was beginning to see his function as a writer of words as a leap into Logos. He was no longer seeing himself simply as <sup>a</sup> writer who, as he said in 1940, "seized an object and made it visible," nor did he wish <sup>simply</sup> to incite sympathy in readers, he began to see himself as a writer who had intuitively reasoned, like the Greeks and Barbarians, and by virtue of his reason had been all along a "Christian." I am oversimplifying, but the connections between the word and Logos are convincing and substantial. Berryman says at the beginning of Part Three, "The Search," that he is

1. Justin Martyr, Apology (I. 5-6) in A New Eusebius, ed. J. Stevenson (London: SPCK, 1963), p.62.
2. Ibid., p.63.

"weak on the Fourth Gospel. I still am/in places; I plan to amend that" (L. & F., p.59); and again in the same poem: "Bishop Westcott's analysis (it took him 25 years)/of the first eighteen verses of St. John/struck me as cunning like Odysseus!" (L. & F., p.60). St. John's first eighteen verses in his Gospel are unique among the Gospels in his attempt to draw together the Greek and Jewish meaning of Logos, but, like Berryman's "Eleven Addresses," these eighteen verses are more "evocative than precise," A.E. Harvey says. In English, the word logos is difficult to translate, and Harvey offers some explanations:

No single English word conveys the associations which the word logos would have had for an educated Greek. It meant far more than a mere unit of spoken language: it included any articulate thought, any logical and meaningful utterance; it was that which gave order and shape to the process of thinking -- proportion in mathematics, rational intelligibility in the study of the natural world, an ordered account of human affairs. It was almost equivalent to "rationality". As such, it was a convenient tool for philosophy: the Stoics, indeed, used the word logos for the immanent rational principle of the whole universe, the single divine system which (according to their philosophy) underlay the multiplicity of the visible world; and doubtless their use of the word had already begun to influence the everyday speech of many Greek-speaking people who had never troubled to explore the theoretical implications of Stoicism.

To Greek-speaking Jews, the word had a still wider range of meanings. In the Bible, God's "word" was not only the means by which (as it might be through a prophet) God communicated with men and brought them in obedience to his law; it was also the expression of his relationship with the whole created universe: God said... and there was, God spoke... and it was done. "My word... should not return me fruitless without accomplishing my purpose" (Isaiah 55. 11). God's word was an expression of his creative power. 1

It is a very short leap of imagination to see that the writer too plays God; like Prospero, the serious writer's word is not only an expression of his creative power, but also the power itself. We have seen that in The Dream Songs Berryman regarded his Songs as daughters, not simply as an analogy or simply as a metaphor, but as a living being. In Love & Fame he regards his poems similarly: "For 'children' read: big fat fresh & original poems" (L. & F., p.25). But he has also expanded the notion of the "word made

1. A.E. Harvey, Companion to the New Testament (London: Oxford and Cambridge University Presses, 1970), p.301.

flesh" to the "Word" made Christ, which calls up the corollary of Christ as "the Word made flesh."

In Part One of Love & Fame, Berryman says that he "grunted, over lines and her/my Muse a nymphet " (L. & F., p.19). In "Two Organs" (i.e. male and female, imagination and the word) he thinks about what kind of "babies" he will produce:

My longing yes was a woman's  
She can't know can she what kind of a baby  
she's going with all the will in the world to produce?  
I suffered trouble over this,

I didn't want my next poem to be exactly like Yeats  
or exactly like Auden  
since in that case where the hell was I?  
but what instead did I want it to sound like?

(L. & F., p.25)

He continues to anguish over "traitoring words" (L. & F., p.29) and pleads, "Will I ever write properly, with passion and exactness...?" (L. & F., p.51). Almost the same words echo in his "reason" for returning to God:

You were good to me & a delicious author,  
rational & passionate.

(L. & F., p.93)

And the verse continues, "Come on me again, /as twice you came to Azarias & Misael" (L. & F., p.93), two of the "barbarians" whom Justin believed were Christian by virtue of their "reason."<sup>1</sup> In reminding ourselves that Christ as Logos, Word made flesh, Berryman's citing Hopkins's notion that Christ is the only and "true literary critic" (L. & F., p.93) begins to make more historical and theological sense. Henry feels "a stub point" is "one odd way to Paradise" (The D.S. VI, 261); Berryman now feels that what his "stub point" scribbles out is Paradise, and the effect is to lay "the rational foundation for a supernatural, superrational edifice."<sup>2</sup> Words became to Berryman not only the means but the end itself. It is a simple and yet

1. Ibid.

2. Malone, New Catholic Encyclopedia, p.677.

extremely complex notion, and I do not wish to cut the matter too fine. But clearly Berryman felt that one way of "knowing" Christ is through the word. He said after he had written his "Eleven Addresses,"

I don't know whether he Christ was in any special sense the son of God, and I think it is quite impossible to know. He certainly was the most remarkable man who ever lived. 1

Perhaps his rationale had not convinced him absolutely; nevertheless, Love & Fame records quick flashes of a new relation between Berryman's life and his art.

Finally, Berryman identified with the Apologist-martyrs because he wished for their bravery in dying (similar to Henry's desire for "knighthood").

In his final "address" Berryman says:

Germanicus leapt upon the wild lion in Smyrna,  
wishing to pass quickly from a lawless life.  
The crowd shook the stadium.  
The proconsul marvelled.

'Eighty-six years have I been his servant,  
and he has done me no harm.  
How can I blaspheme my king who saved me?'  
Polycarp, John's pupil, facing the fire.

Make too me acceptable at the end of time  
in my degree, which then Thou wilt award.  
Cancer, senility, mania,  
I pray I may be ready with my witness.

(L. & F., p.94)

"Endurance" and "nobility" are what all accounts praise in these martyrs' purchasing in a "single hour" eternal life,<sup>2</sup> and Berryman expresses here his fervent wish to follow their example. Though he claimed that "Eleven Addresses" were neither "Christian" nor "prayers,"<sup>3</sup> he does say "pray" (in effect, for a brave death) in the last line. But his "prayer" is ambiguous; he wants whatever torment "to" be acceptable to him, and he wants

1. Stitt, "The Art of Poetry: An Interview with John Berryman," p.205.

2. <sup>Stevenson, ed., A New Eusebius,</sup> p.19. See pp.19-25 for an account of Germanicus and Polycarp's martyrdom.

3. Stitt, "The Art of Poetry: An Interview with John Berryman," p.205.

to follow Germanicus and Polycarp's example "too." He wants, in other words, suffering he may use not suffering that will kill him.<sup>1</sup> To the end, Berryman's certainty was never settled, but if we are to judge his sense of identity by Love & Fame, he had arrived at a new steadiness and assurance, his "touchstones" were both personal and cosmic, set in time and beyond time.

### III. ii. Confessional Poetry and Transparent Writing

The craze of the reading public at this moment is biography and autobiography. Nothing but the lives of distinguished or notorious people, if possible written by themselves, will now give satisfaction to the general reader.

Spectator, 1888

Every thing can go, but this stark, bare rocky directness of statement, this alone makes poetry today.

D.H. Lawrence

Given Berryman's poetics of life in art and art in life, it seems inevitable that he would place himself squarely in the center of his poetry. Berryman's presence in Homage to Mistress Bradstreet presents few problems; his voice and his actions modulate into Anne Bradstreet's, he does not obtrude. His presence in The Dream Songs presents some difficulty, but the objective sense Henry's presence gives is enough distance from Berryman to make his presence acceptable. His presence in Love & Fame seems to annoy some, and those who have protested against Berryman's presence are not so much concerned about the notion of a personality, but rather, this particular personality before them. He is taken to task severely for his "sheer egocentricity,"

1. See also Berryman's insistence on the use of suffering in his interview with Stitt, "The Art of Poetry: An Interview with John Berryman," p.207. Berryman said, "My idea is this: the artist is extremely lucky who is presented with the worst possible ordeal which will not actually kill him. At that point he's in business."

and "self-aggrandizement and lack of compassion,"<sup>1</sup> and his "conversion"<sup>2</sup> seems impossible to at least one reviewer. The personality seems a craggy, unpleasant one. Apart from considerations of Berryman's egocentricity, morality, and sincerity, his new direct style seems to many of these same critics artless and trivial. These are points which must be considered, and in my discussion I shall keep them in mind. As we have seen, Love & Fame is a deceptively, cunningly simple volume, and it requires a second and third reading if the "certain explosive feeling" is to do its work and rise above triviality.

The general responsive climate for poetry since Robert Lowell's Life Studies in 1959 has been favorable to "confessional poetry,"<sup>3</sup> but the critical damning and praising of this kind of poetry has been taken to extremes. Some critics write off the mode as dangling one's nerves in public and joining the suicide bandwagon, while others admire its searing, purging honesty and naked psyche in a true exploration of the self. As far as I know, M.L. Rosenthal first used the term "confessional poetry" when he reviewed Lowell's Life Studies in 1959. Later in his book The New Poets (1967), Rosenthal says that the term caught on quickly, too quickly, so that it was divested of its more subtle and traditional meanings: "whoever invented it [the term 'confessional poetry'] it was a term both helpful and too limited, and very possibly the conception of a confessional school has by now done a certain amount of damage."<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, Rosenthal does little more than continue to use the term with quotation marks; perhaps we are meant to take this as repairing some of the damage. But the term has since become so firmly entrenched that we are stuck with it, it is about as much real critical use as Dr. Johnson's tag "metaphysical poets."<sup>5</sup> In

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1. Phillips, "Balling the Muse," p.72.
  2. Carruth, "Love, Art and Money," p.437.
  3. Lowell, of course, denies indignantly that Life Studies is confessional. He might apply to himself the phrase he applies to Berryman -- "a single drive against the barriers of the common place." Lowell, "The Poetry of John Berryman," p.3.
  4. Rosenthal, The New Poets, p.25.
  5. Adapted from Dryden on Donne: "He seemed to affect the metaphysics..."

his discussion of Life Studies, Rosenthal goes on to describe "confessional poetry" as it is most often regarded:

Sexual guilt, alcoholism, repeated confinement in a mental hospital (and some suggestion that the malady has its violent phase) -- these are explicit themes of a number of poems, usually developed in the first person and intended without question to point to the author himself. 1

Such poetry, Rosenthal rightly observes, has "the impact of purely personal release."<sup>2</sup> Of course impact is not all that should be considered (Rosenthal does consider the question further); impact and immediacy are all too often considered to be the only strengths of "confessional poetry."

For my own approach, I think that "personal poetry" or "poetry of personality" would be better terms, but since "confessional poetry" seems to be the term destined to describe the genre, perhaps I should work within the term. If we are to call Love & Fame "confessional," the traditional meanings of the term must be part of our evaluation, for Love & Fame belongs to a larger tradition than merely yelping in public. For the breadth and depth of the tradition, an excellent and clear set of distinctions and definitions has been explained by Alan Richardson:

In the ancient Church confessio meant the profession of faith made by a martyr (or 'confessor' who had withstood persecution for his faith) (cf. I Tim. 6.13; II Cor. 9.13). The word thus came to mean a firm declaration of religious convictions with or without reference to persecution.... It could also have a still more general sense, namely, the biblical sense of praising God, e.g. St. Augustine's Confessions, in which Augustine blesses God for his conversion. 3

The matter of Berryman's "conversion" I have discussed briefly and I shall return to it, but for now let us say that Love & Fame belongs to the tradition of a confessio which blesses God for one's conversion. I have said, too, that Love & Fame, especially "Eleven Addresses," is a sort of apologia, but it is apparent that the confessio is a sort of apologia in its "firm declaration of religious convictions." So Love & Fame may be called a

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1. Rosenthal, The New Poets, p.26.
  2. Ibid., p.27.
  3. Alan Richardson, ed., A Dictionary of Christian Theology (London: SCM Press, 1969), p.70.

confessio in this sense as well, for it is Berryman's profession of faith: "I do not understand; but I believe" (L. & F., p.91). Finally, Love & Fame is a confessio in that Berryman sets out to praise God. We get some gobbets of his wretchedness, but his intention is to put down everything that most matters to him, vices and virtues.

The "confessional" of the Catholic Church would certainly have been part of Berryman's thinking in writing Love & Fame. When he was asked about being a "confessional poet" he responded angrily, disowning the label and shifting the adjective to the noun "The word ['confessional'] doesn't mean anything. I understand the confessional to be a place where you go and talk with a priest."<sup>1</sup> But "confession" may be public as well, which Berryman would have known but did not mention; so "confession" must be defined as a private and public act:

Confession is an acknowledgement of sin made in general terms at a public service of worship or with reference to the penitent's own personal sin(s) in private ('auricular') confession to a priest. In either case confession is usually followed by the pronouncement of absolution. 2

These are significant distinctions; what seems to have happened in much poetry during the past twenty-five years is that the private confession has been taken to the public rostrum where the "public confession" formerly was given in general terms.

So the questions of why Berryman chose to confess private matters publicly and to whom his confessions are addressed must be considered before going further. It is apparent that Berryman "confessed" out of a private need, a need to see himself as others saw him, a need to "take an inventory of himself," to list "his qualities -- his equipment" as Alan Sevrance (another "friend" of Berryman's) does in Recovery.<sup>3</sup> I would suggest three other reasons for Berryman's new confessional mode: his kind of mind which was

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1. Stitt, "The Art of Poetry: An Interview with John Berryman," pp.181-82.
  2. Richardson, ed. A Dictionary of Christian Theology, p.70.
  3. Berryman, Recovery, pp.38-39.

bent on stripping away the layers of thought, feeling, and experience (as in The Dream Songs); his desire to instruct, not didactically, but, as he taught his classes, by exemplifying; and his desire to praise God by confessing his sins and revealing His mercy, a living example that God "rescues" again and again.

The first of these three reasons may be dealt with easily enough. Berryman's poetry, from its complex and obscure beginnings, always had that quality of an intelligent, voraciously inquiring mind. If he put himself at the center of the poem, then the layers <sup>of</sup> the warts would be peeled away in any such inquiry. The second reason, instruction, might seem odd indeed for such an ego-centered, seemingly privately motivated poet, but his "egotism" was that of Whitman and Wordsworth's who insisted, implicitly and explicitly, that the reader should emulate their self-exploration and self-scrutiny, not, it should be remembered, a self-exploration in which one closes the closet door and nurses wounds, opens scars and alternately pours salt and balm on the wounds, but a self-exploration and self-scrutiny in the hope of understanding and maturing one's relations with others and in the hope of understanding the human condition. Berryman hardly set out to shock readers (most readers would have known something about his drinking and his reputation, true or not, with women). He would have been well aware that the shock value of "confessional poetry" is a tendency towards self-indulgence in the use of private references. It is a serious limitation if the poet uses too many private references, and Berryman, at first, seems to do so in Love & Fame. When he says he gorges himself "on Peek Freans & brood S" (L. & F., p.49), does he mean he gorges on books, or a person, or a brand-named biscuit? His British audience would know that he means a brand-named biscuit. But most of his topical references explain themselves: "David's forever new bookstall in Market Hill" (L. & F., p.48), or when he says he is on his way "to Bumpus' & the Cam" (L. & F., p.43), we know, or may find out easily, that the Cam

is the river for which Cambridge takes its name, and we learn in the next poem that Bumpus is a bookshop (L. & F., p.46). And most other references may be learned easily enough. These are not simply topical and private references; they burst into significant meaning, as in his reference to Peter Warlock/Philip Heseltine. When the reader begins to feel his way through the concrete references and sees the drift of the whole of Love & Fame, he finds himself in the middle of the more universal meanings of self-exploration.

One of the difficulties in accepting that part of Berryman's intent was to instruct might be that nowhere does he implore or even nudge the reader (except in his "Afterword"). But consider the consequences if he had done so; he would appear smug and lose the sense of his miraculous conversion. And further, modern readers, even Keats said, do not like poetry that has a "palpable design" on them. If Berryman, or any poet, wants to instruct a modern audience, he must do so without the reader's being aware of it.

A third reason for Berryman's "confessing" was his desire to praise God for His mercy. The superficial parallels between Love & Fame and St. Augustine's Confessions have been noted (and written off by that particular reviewer<sup>1</sup>), but the deeper parallels between Augustinian thought and Love & Fame suggest a similarity which reinforces the notion that Berryman was "confessing" in praise of God. Both Berryman and Augustine are open to the charge that they were extremely proud of how much they had to confess. But both Berryman and Augustine were far too perceptive and subtle to be charged with sensationalism. It is essential to remember that Augustine (like Berryman) was, as Robert Sayer suggests, speaking "not as an ex-sinner but as a living Christian"<sup>2</sup>; Augustine "was not parading himself but making

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1. Jerome Mazzaro, "False Confessions," Shenandoah XXII (Winter, 1971), 86.
  2. Robert Sayer, The Examined Self (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), p.10.

an illustration of himself, addressing God and at the same time speaking 'in the ears also of the believing sons of men.'<sup>1</sup>

The strongest parallel between Augustinian thought and Love & Fame is the four parts or stages of the Soul's journey towards God, the journeyer is in via in order to dwell in patria, a journey in which "relatedness to God is not a position but a movement, not a point but process."<sup>2</sup> From the outset of Love & Fame Berryman is a journeyer (a familiar figure) who seeks a home until he finds his earthly home and his home in God. Roy W. Battenhouse describes the four stages of the Augustinian "'journey not of feet'":

Each stage is at once the condition and the preparation of the next. As each is attained, the next comes into view; approach becomes arrival, which in turn becomes a new approach. Thus each level of the ascent reveals the total bent and motive of the journey; yet each, except the last, exists only in order to be overcome by its successor. 3

Does the last clause not sound strikingly similar to Berryman's description<sup>4</sup> of the four parts of Love & Fame, "each of the four movements criticizing backward the preceding, until Part IV wipes out all other presentations..." (L. & F., p.95)?

In each of the four stages of the Augustinian journey of the soul and those of Love & Fame the parallels are even more remarkably similar. In the first step, Battenhouse says, "The soul must be purged from moral disorder and intellectual error, both of which for Augustine, always involve an inordinate attachment to things of sensory appetite and perception."<sup>4</sup> A few brief examples of Berryman's sensory appetite in Part One will suffice:

... we fondled each other's wonders.

(L. & F., p.14)

... I feasted on Louise.

(L. & F., p.14)

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1. Ibid., p.11.
  2. Roy W. Battenhouse, A Companion to the Study of St. Augustine (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), p.401.
  3. Ibid., p.404.
  4. Ibid., p.405.

... night on night till 4 til 5 a.m.  
intertangled breathless, sweating, on a verge  
six or seven nerve-destroying hours...

(L. & F., p.23)

'I wish my penis was big enough for this whole lake'  
My phantasy precisely at twenty:  
to satisfy at once all Barnard & Smith  
& have enough left over for Miss Gibb's girls.

(L. & F., p.26)

At the same time, in the first stage (I shall be quoting Battenhouse throughout my discussion of these four stages), "there is a vague yet intense longing for a state not clearly known but urgently desired,"<sup>1</sup> and this longing is not only for a state of being but also, as in all four stages, for "a keen desire to know, a sensitive knowledge of what is truly desired."<sup>2</sup> Berryman keenly desires "to know" in Part One as much as he rollicks intensely in sex:

I vowed I poured more thought that Fall into Auden  
than into Shirley C...

(L. & F., p.17)

I read everybody, borrowing their books from Mark,  
it took me quite a while to get to Yeats.

(L. & F., p.22)

I paged the whole century through for five monk's months  
keeping an encyclopedic notebook.

(L. & F., p.24)

In my serpentine researches  
I came upon a book review in Poetry...

(L. & F., p.27)

And so I might continue. Most of these quotations about Berryman's "serpentine researches" appear side by side with accounts of his insatiable sexual appetite, the effect being that the mind and the senses vie for importance. In the first stage, Berryman is not sure what he wants or

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

exactly what his goals are; one time he will say, "To be a critic, ah/how deeper & more scientific" (L. & F., p.27), then another, "I couldn't sculpt into my helpless verse yet" (L. & F., p.34), and he summarizes his uncertainty, "many thought Berryman was under weigh/he wasn't sure himself" (L. & F., p.19). Nevertheless, the motives and goals of the entire via are clear: Berryman searches for answers in knowledge and art and he wants to make some human contact (though it is sexual at this stage).

In the second stage, "self-seeking becomes self-knowledge," and the journeyer "must remain for a space within himself, living and tasting to the full the interior riches of the realm of the spirit...."<sup>1</sup> So in Part Two Berryman is at Cambridge; he travels to the "haunts of the old masters where I may improve" (L. & F., p.43), and when he arrives he says, "Old masters of old Cambridge, I am listening" (L. & F., p.48). He observes a "Monkhood" and he is "Friendless"; he does not do "a damned thing but read and write" (L. & F., p.49). He does not show his work to anybody, and the "only souls" he feels "toward" (not for) are "Henry Vaughan & Wordsworth" (L. & F., p.50). But he still has "a keen desire to know," he strives for "a sensitive knowledge of what is truly desired"<sup>2</sup>: "Will I ever write properly with passion & exactness,/of the damned strange demeanors of my flagrant heart?" (L. & F., p.51).

Another aspect of Berryman's self-knowledge appears in this second stage; he begins to see himself as others see him. They see his "'Satanic pride'" (L. & F., p.51) and his "bloody-mindedness" (L. & F., p.52) and Berryman stands "ashamed" of himself (not in a self-pitying way, he adds, "yes, but I stand" L. & F., p.52<sup>7</sup>). And, finally, his sexual desires, while still extreme, are abated long enough for him to experience a more serious relationship, a manifestation of his intuitive self-knowledge rather than conscious self-knowledge.

1. Ibid., p.406.

2. Ibid., p.405.

In the third stage the journeyer becomes a pilgrim again (Part Three opens with "The Search"), and he begins with confession and praise:

... a mighty hand was  
after my works too, feeling here & there,  
& finding them, bit by bit.

(L. & F., p.59)

And in this stage, "Augustine exhorts us to put aside all self-absorption."<sup>1</sup> Berryman does not entirely (we should remember that Augustine is speaking of an ideal), but he does advise two desperate teenagers what he himself attempts to practice:

... take up, outside your blocked selves, some small thing  
that is moving  
& wants to keep on moving  
& needs therefore... your loving.

(L. & F., p.74)

During the third stage "the pilgrim seeks not knowledge but forgiveness."<sup>2</sup> So in this stage Berryman is racked with guilt; in the poem "Damned" he dreams of a woman (perhaps it actually happened, perhaps she stands for those whom Berryman has mistreated) with whom he had, almost cruelly, sexual intercourse:

She came again & again, twice ejecting me  
over her heaving. I turned my head aside  
to avoid her goddammed tears,  
getting in my beard.

(L. & F., p.67)

He saw her again later (perhaps in another dream) and she was pregnant:

"I did not say 'Is it mine?'" (L. & F., p.67). He never asks her directly for forgiveness, but implicit in his public confession he seems to be asking for forgiveness in not showing concern. Elsewhere, in fact in the previous poem, he does ask for general forgiveness: "I will say: I have been wrong" (L. & F., p.66). "The pilgrim seeks not knowledge but forgiveness, because he knows himself so well,"<sup>3</sup> and "when the mind knows itself, it knows itself

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1. Ibid., p.407.
  2. Ibid., p.408.
  3. Ibid.

as seeking."<sup>1</sup> From the first poem in Part Three, "The Search," Berryman shows an awareness of a mind that knows itself as seeking; the titles of three poems, "Hell," "Purgatory," and "Heaven" suggest a conscious Dantean search.

The last transition, the fourth stage, culminates in "life with God"; whereas, in the first three stages, the pilgrim was in "life under God." This new life is "not only the climax of an intellectual process but also the satisfaction of longing and desire."<sup>2</sup> But Berryman's sense of arriving is not entirely satisfactory, "I do not understand, but I believe" (L. & F., p.91). This final resting place, as long as the pilgrim lives, "is spoken of in the future tense"<sup>3</sup>, thus Berryman would say, "Rest may be your ultimate gift" (L. & F., p.88). Most of his addresses are requests which he hopes will be fulfilled: "Forsake me not" (L. & F., p.86); "Let me pace without fear" (L. & F., p.86); "strengthen my widow" (L. & F., p.88); "Ease in their passing life my beloved friends" (L. & F., p.91) and so on. The future tense is significant: Augustine is ambivalent on the matter because he realized that in this life we can only know "foretastes of eternal blessedness, though transient and fragile."<sup>4</sup> And so Berryman's journey ends:

Make too me acceptable at the end of time  
in my degree, which then Thou wilt award.  
Cancer, senility, mania,  
I pray I may be ready with my witness.

(L. & F., p.94)

When we see Love & Fame in a larger, historical context, when we see it as a via journeying towards patria, then clearly the current definitions of "confessional poetry" simply will not do to describe the volume.

When Louis L. Martz reviewed Love & Fame he compared the volume with Wordsworth's Prelude and observed that it was "in a mode of frankness

1. Ibid., p.409.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p.410.
4. Ibid., p.410.

impossible for the nineteenth century."<sup>1</sup> That might be true, but we still must contend with any writer's "mode of frankness," and with each new self-revelation, we must contend with how and in what way his mode is frank or sincere. If the poet is to confess truly, if he tells all or even a little of his private life, then we must listen both to a voice and become acquainted with a personality. The confessor's, in this case the poet's, voice or tone may be extremely individual, and the personality may be abrasive and unlikeable; any poet who wishes to project his own personality and his own voice runs the risk of being rejected more in subjective, personal terms than in public, objective terms. If the poet successfully projects himself and if he does it with his unmistakably individual voice, this puts special demands upon the reader. The reader, as Ernest Stefanik has said of Love & Fame, must disregard his own nature and tastes, and become a "chameleon" himself, but if the reader is "aware of the intentional fallacy," he "ought to find an objective sympathy, the point at which critical expectation and poetic intention converge."<sup>2</sup>

So before pursuing Berryman's "confessions" in Love & Fame we must consider the role of the reader. I am suggesting that the confessional poet makes as great a demand upon the reader as Berryman's "disrupted and mended syntax," but as with his syntax, the reader is invited to participate. The question at the end of the process which any reader has a right to ask is: "Was it worth it"?

Nathaniel Hawthorne, in one of his few openly "personal" statements, addresses the reader in his introductory "Custom-House" section to The Scarlet Letter and he presses the nerve of the matter of private confessions and the rights of the reader. (It should be remembered that Hawthorne tries to persuade his audience, which was unused to reading "mere fiction"

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1. Louis L. Marts, "Recent Poetry: Berryman and Others," The Yale Review, Vol. 61 (March 1972), 411.
  2. Stefanik, "A Cursing Glory: John Berryman's Love & Fame," p.115.

in America in 1850, that his novel is based on fact and therefore worthy of their attention.) Hawthorne apologizes for imposing his humble, autobiographical preface on the public, but, he says, "unless the speaker stands in some true relation with his audience" their "native reserve" will not be melted. Hawthorne hopes to strike a balance, however, in which the author may be autobiographical "without violating either the reader's rights or his own." Hawthorne severely criticizes those writers who

indulge themselves in such confidential depths of revelation as could fittingly be addressed, only and exclusively, to the one heart and mind of perfect sympathy; as if the printed book, thrown at large on the wide world, were certain to find out the divided segment of the writer's own nature, and complete his circle of existence by bringing him into communion with it. It is scarcely decorous, however, to speak all, even when we speak impersonally. 1

Hawthorne's distinctions and perceptions are helpful in determining the reader's role in "confessional poetry." The poet who wishes to reveal his own private life and make it the subject of his poetry is indeed attempting to "stand in some true relation to his audience"; the difficulty is that his life may be such that his confidence will be accepted "only and exclusively, to the one heart and mind of perfect sympathy." If the reader is sympathetic, then the poet has in a sense completed "his circle of existence by bringing the reader into communion with it," but only when the reader responds directly to the poet. If the poet does not know of a reader's response, then his circle is not completed.

Berryman's "confessions" in Love & Fame have these qualities of "attempting to stand in some true relation to his audience," of "addressing one heart and mind of perfect sympathy," and of attempting to "complete his circle of existence." But all of these same qualities may be attributed to The Dream Songs as well, and it would seem that these notions of the reader's

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1. Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter (New York: Washington Square Press, 1948), pp.1-2.

role have been part of Berryman's thinking for some time. In 1959 he said, "Poetry is a terminal activity, taking place out near the end of things, where the poet's soul addresses one other soul only, never mind when,"<sup>1</sup> and of his use of ambiguous pronouns in The Dream Songs, he said, "Out of this ambiguity arises richness. The reader becomes more aware and is forced to enter into himself."<sup>2</sup> But in Love & Fame this device of the pronoun is discarded (perhaps shifting verb tenses are meant to replace the device); the reader stands alone with the poet. In The Dream Songs we may accept that Henry's "confessions" are passive confessions spurred on by dreams; in Love & Fame the "confessions" are active; the poet overtly has designs upon himself and the reader may rightly hold some reservations about Berryman's motives. A poet's motives in "confessional poetry" are all important. Even if the reader is willing to read sympathetically, he may still wonder why the poet chooses to tell us what he does.

Speaking of Robert Lowell's Life Studies, Hayden Carruth has summarized succinctly many opinions on "confessional poetry":

What Lowell was doing in those poems, I think, was exploring his own and his family's life, in extreme seriousness, to see if he could give that body of experience an imaginative organization strong enough, in the face of the depersonalizing force of a modern collective and techno-maniacal world, to stand as an integrated structure. A will, a personality, a being. He was trying to create a life: his own. 3

Carruth responded very differently to Berryman's attempt to recreate his own life:

... Berryman's new poems give little evidence of trial. They have no real seriousness or creative force, but only a kind of edgy exhibitionism. They are precisely confessions and nothing more; except when they are something less, i.e. brags and rants.

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It Love & Fame is full of self-contradictions, special pleading, vagueness, what emerges is not a personality, not an integrated being but only a splotchy muddlement of crude desires. 4

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1. Berryman, "The Revolving Bookstand," p.386.
  2. Howard, "Whisky and Ink, Whisky and Ink," p.76.
  3. Carruth, "Love, Art and Money," p.437.
  4. Ibid.

Compare Carruth's response with that of Louis J. Martz: "It Love & Fame is a moving tragic tale, summed up with wit, love, courage, and spiritual vision."<sup>1</sup>

These polar responses are due, in part, to personal and subjective tastes and a like or dislike of the personality before them. Carruth's judgement is moral and with that one may not quarrel, Berryman was immoral, but are not courage and morality displayed as well? What the whole matter of one's accepting Berryman's confessions hinges on is whether he was sincere; we often are willing to tolerate immorality if we recognize a sincere change of heart; we admire such courage. Like so many critical terms "sincerity" may be interpreted variously, and we must turn to a brief consideration of what is meant by "sincerity."

A person's sincerity, we often feel, depends upon his motivation, tone (or style), and actions. If a person says one thing and does another then we say he was not sincere. On the other hand, does it not happen in our complex human life that a person may say one thing sincerely and still do another? And, too, sincerity may be a public role, as Lionel Trilling has observed in his recent book Sincerity and Authenticity:

Society requires of us that we present ourselves as being sincere, and the most efficacious way of satisfying this demand is to see to it that we really are sincere, that we actually are what we want our community to know we are. In short, we play the role of being ourselves, we sincerely act the part of the sincere person, with the result that a judgement may be passed upon our sincerity that is not authentic. 2

This is still a question of motive; why does the writer tell us what he does? Is he attempting to satisfy our expectations or is he attempting to be true to himself? And the further question, which is more important? Self or society? And still further, can it be that if we play the role of being sincere could it not have not only social benefit but also personal benefit?

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1. Martz, "Recent Poetry: Berryman and Others," p.411.
  2. Lionel Trilling, Sincerity and Authenticity (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp.10-11.

(i.e. that which a person emulates, he may become). The most I may do here is to present the knotty problem. In the end, an author's sincerity must be the reader's act of faith, and to judge literature by the various criteria of sincerity<sup>1</sup> may raise interesting questions but we are left finally with the reader's willingness to be a chameleon reader. Berryman asks the reader, in effect, to admire what he attempts, not what he does, as Blake did in his explanation "To the Public" for "Jerusalem":

I am perhaps the most sinful of men. I pretend not to holiness: yet I pretend to love, to see, to converse daily as man with man, & the more to have an interest in the Friend of Sinners. Therefore, dear Reader, forgive wh at you do not approve, & love me for this energetic exertion of my talent. 2

"By itself," Henri Peyre has said, "sincerity in a writer never sufficed to give merit to a work of art":

It is obvious that an artist's and a writer's task is primarily to communicate what he has seen, felt, and thought, and to arouse in his public an experience as intense, or more intense, than the one which he himself underwent. If his power of communication, which implies among other things some amount of sincerity toward his material and his art, is great enough, it may matter much less to inquire how profoundly he felt, whether he was in a trance or worked himself up to a state resembling inspiration, or how many masks he needed in order to exorcise all the warring demons, or angels, in him. The stress on sincerity would be deadly to literature if it were ever to impair the freedom which must remain the privilege of creative inspiration. 3

On the matter of the writer's sincerity in the act of writing, Berryman's sincerity is not open to question. But there is still the question, at least in Love & Fame, of the writer's sincerity of his actions as described in his poems. It seems to me that this problem of the sincerity of the actions presented in Love & Fame turns entirely on Berryman's "conversion." I have said that he is still in the "process" of conversion, but his real "conversion" has taken place and he is attempting, in "Eleven

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1. See Henri Peyre, Literature and Sincerity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), pp.306-307. Peyre lists four criteria: aesthetic, psychological, social, and moral.
  2. Blake, The Complete Writings of William Blake, p.21.
  3. Henri Peyre, Literature and Sincerity, p.339.

Addresses," to come to terms with what his conversion means and will mean to him. In the first address Berryman says that he has written a prayer (remembering that his "Eleven Addresses" are not prayers but incline towards prayer) "containing with precision everything that most matters./ 'According to Thy will' the thing begins" (L. & F., p.83). (The prayer is not included in "Eleven Addresses" but appears later in Delusions Etc. [p.62].) The fact that he has written a prayer suggests his conversion, and in a later "address," Berryman tells us that indeed his conversion has recently taken place:

You pierced the roof  
twice & again. Finally you opened my eyes  
  
My double nature fused in that point of time  
three weeks ago day before yesterday. 1

(L. & F., p.89)

Hayden Carruth was not able to accept this "conversion"; he says of these lines:

He [Berryman] seems to be saying, "If you believe this you'll believe anything." In a saint or mystic we might accept that, though not without strain; we might even celebrate it. But in this boasting, equivocating secularist? What does he take us for? 2

The question all but presents itself in words, why not? Why not believe him? The nature of religious conversion is complex beyond analysis, and it seems to me a presumption, even an example of the arrogance for which Carruth will not accept Berryman's conversion, not to accept what he says. It was far too serious a matter, both in his life and in "Eleven Addresses," to be a public pose.

On the nature of religious conversion, William James in his book The Varieties of Religious Experience, lucidly explains "the hot place in man's consciousness" which bursts forth into a sudden conversion:

1. For an account of what, apparently, brought about Berryman's conversion see his account in his interview with Peter Stitt, pp.202-204.
2. Carruth, "Love, Art and Money," p.437. ("Secularist" is not used in the English sense of the word, I take it, a declared enemy of Christianity, but in a wider sense of a man very much tied to the world and its pleasures.)

... the group of ideas to which he [that person who might suddenly be converted] devotes himself, and from which he works, call it the habitual center of his personal energy. It makes a great difference to a man whether one set of his ideas or another, be the center of his energy; and it makes a great difference, as regards any set of ideas which he may possess, whether they become central or remain peripheral in him. To say that a man is "converted" means, in these terms, that religious ideas, previously peripheral in his consciousness, now take a central place, and that religious aims form the habitual center of his energy. 1

Berryman's account of his "center of energy" in Love & Fame suggests that this is precisely what happened to him. The opening poem of Part Three indicates that his religious ideas were at one time peripheral in his consciousness:

I began the historical study of the Gospel  
indebted above all to Guignebert  
& Goguel & McNeille  
& Bultmann even & later Archbishop Carrington.

The Miracles were a stumbling-block;  
until I read Karl Heim, trained in natural science;  
until I had sufficiently attended to  
The Transfiguration & The Ecstasy.

I was weak on the Fourth Gospel. I still am,  
in places; I plan to amend that.  
Wellisch on Isaac & Oedipus  
supplements for me Kierkegaard.

Luther on Galatians (his grand joy)  
I laid aside until I was older & wiser.  
Bishop Andrewes' account of the Resurrection-appearances  
in 1609 seemed to me, seems to me, it.

I studied Titian's remarks on The Tribute-Money.  
Bishop Westcott's analysis (it took him 25 years)  
of the first eighteen verses of St. John  
struck me as of a cunning like Odysseus<sup>1</sup>.

And other systems, high & primitive,  
ancient & surviving, did I not neglect,  
sky-gods & trickster-gods, gods impotent,  
the malice & force of the dead.

When twelve Einstein lost belief in God  
he said to himself at once (as he put it later)  
'Similarly motivated men, both of the past & of the present,  
together with their achieved insights,  
waren die unverlierbaren Freunde' -- the unloseable friends.

(L. & F., pp.59-60)

1. William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (London: The Fontana Library, 1960), pp.200-201.

Shall I state the obvious? This is a formidable reading list; furthermore, one has a sense that it was not all! But Berryman was not out to impress us with his reading; "these things" as John Bayley says of Berryman's "racked soul" and "exhibitionist behaviour," "are simply there...."<sup>1</sup> Not only is the list impressive, it is revealing; it reveals Berryman's "habitual center of his personal energy" which would inexorably swell from a peripheral research to burst at the center of his consciousness. He alludes obliquely to his father's suicide in mentioning Einstein's loss of faith in God at twelve (later he says, "my father's blow-it-all when I was twelve/blew out my most bright candle faith... L. & F., p.897), but Einstein also said, and Berryman has emulated him, that men with "their achieved insights" were "unloseable friends." Berryman's gazing and gazing on such men was like John Henry Newman's description of how Cicero, by imitating the style, manner, and actions of a senator, developed his inner-self, and "imbibed and became what he admired."<sup>2</sup>

As for why or how Berryman was converted (except for what he tells us in an interview<sup>3</sup>), we are not told in Love & Fame. But is it possible to tell why or how any person is converted, even from a psychological point of view? Again William James is helpful:

Now if you ask of psychology just how the excitement shifts in a man's mental system, and why aims that were peripheral become of a certain moment central, psychology has to reply that although she can give a general description of what happens, she is unable in a given case to account accurately for all the single forces at work. 4

And James concludes that when we look carefully at individual conversions, our explanations of them "get so vague and general that one realizes all the more the intense individuality of the whole phenomenon."<sup>5</sup>

If the poet confesses and if he is sincere, then his style and

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1. Bayley, "On John Berryman," p.89.
  2. John Henry Cardinal Newman, The Idea of a University (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1959), p.274.
  3. Stitt, "The Art of Poetry: An Interview with John Berryman, pp.202-204.
  4. James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p.201.
  5. Ibid. For further discussion of the nature of conversion, see James's chapters on conversion, pp.194-257.

tone must mediate his feeling and experience, what Berryman referred to as "transparent art." This kind of art, if we take the term to mean showing through to the person, should be something like Rousseau's hope to make his life, himself, live with and in the reader:

I should like in some way to make my soul transparent to the reader's eye, and for that purpose I am trying to present it from all points of view, to show it in all lights, and to contrive that none of its movements shall escape his notice, so that he may judge for himself of the principle which has produced them. 1

Berryman's insistence on the poet's being there while the reader reads inevitably pushed him towards a more direct and unadorned style, a poetry, as he said as early as The Dispossessed, of the "Barefoot soul fringed with rime" (T.D., p.94). "Disrupted and mended" syntax had been, since his Sonnets, part of his calculation to "express the matter in hand/but adds to the stock of available reality" (L. & F., p.27). Directness, especially in the later Dream Songs increasingly became more his mode. Henry in fact warned us that we might expect change; near the end of The Dream Songs he says, "I will not come again/or not come with this style" (The D.S. VII, 379). Perhaps his quarrel with Eliot's "impersonality of the poet" had something to do with Berryman's gradual change; certainly he quarrelled, even in 1947, with Cleanth Brooks's statement, "The method of art can, I believe, never be direct -- is always indirect," and Berryman answers simply, "I wonder."<sup>2</sup> Not until Love & Fame did he insist on that directness.

In an interview, he explained that his "newly-simple heart" (D.E., p.54) meant a "transparency" of art, where the reader sees through art to life:

Some of the best kind of writing is really transparent; you don't notice that you are reading an article. I'll show you what I mean. This is the most marvelous Madonna I have ever seen. And you get no impression of viewing art. 3

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1. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, The Confessions, trans. J.M. Cohen (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1954), p.169.
  2. John Berryman, "Metaphysical or So," The Nation CLXIV (June 28, 1947), 776.
  3. Berg, "An Interview with John Berryman," p.15. I have corrected some of the printing errors.

Then the interviewer asked, "Can you give an example from literature that has this transparency?"

The Odyssey, the "Paradiso." Most books of later age. Beethoven's late quartets, where the appearance of art disappears, everything becomes unbelievably simple. The artist just says what he thinks, or says how he feels. For example, instead of making a long speech, he says "I hurt," or he says to the reader, "are you hurting?"

Take a line from The Tempest, "Turfy mountains where live nibbling sheep." 1 Now, that is absolutely magnificent, but incredibly simple. The art comes just in placing, pure syntax.

Admittedly, 'turfy' is good, and 'nibbling' is good, and it's nicely held together. That's what happens, turf is what you nibble, if you're a sheep. But, it really is so powerful because 'live' is so low-keyed. You expect something bigger. The height at the front of the line, and another height at the end of the line, so you want something way low-keyed down in the middle. 2

The interviewer asked Berryman if he could think of a Twentieth Century work which demonstrates this transparency:

Four Quartets by Eliot. At a certain point it occurs to him to say, "Humility is endless." How's that. In verse. 3

That Berryman should choose examples from Shakespeare and Eliot suggests his historical knowledge of "transparent art." He might very well have known Coleridge's statement about Shakespeare's poetry where Coleridge all but uses the word transparency:

[A characteristic] which belongs only to a great poet is the power of so carrying the eye of the reader as to make him almost lose consciousness of the words -- to make him see everything -- and this without exciting any painful or laborious attention, without any anatomy of description (a fault not uncommon in descriptive poetry) but with the sweetness and easy movement of nature. 4

And in Berryman's love-hate relationship with Eliot perhaps he knew of Eliot's statement about transparency which he made in a lecture in 1933 on "English

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1. The Tempest, Act IV, Scene 1, line 62. The whole line should be: "Thy turf mountains, where live nibbling sheep...."
  2. Berg, "An Interview with John Berryman," p.15. I have corrected some of the printing errors.
  3. Ibid.
  4. Samuel T. Coleridge, Shakespearean Criticism, Vol.I, ed. T.H. Raysor (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1960), p.189.

Letter Writers" (primarily on Keats and Lawrence). Eliot quoted Lawrence's insistence on directness in poetry, "Every thing can go, but this stark, bare rocky directness of statement, this alone makes poetry, to-day"; and Eliot was prompted to add:

This speaks to me of that at which I have aimed, in writing poetry; to write poetry which should be essentially poetry, with nothing poetic about it, poetry standing naked in its bare bones, or poetry so transparent that we should not see the poetry, but that which we are meant to see through through the poetry, poetry so transparent that in reading it we are intent on what the poem points at, and not on the poetry, this seems to me the thing to try for. To get beyond poetry, as Beethoven, in his later works, strove to get beyond music. 1

I cite one last source towards definition and possible influence. In Berryman's index to Keats's Letters (see Appendix A), he notes the phrases "the true voice of feeling" and "unobtrusive" which are taken from two different letters, and under "Shak[spears]" he notes Keats's reference to "Shakespeare's Sonnets":

It may be interesting to you [Keats writes to John Hamilton Reynolds] to pick out some lines from Hyperion [sic] and put a mark X to false poetry proceeding from art, and one || to the true voice of feeling. 2

Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters one's soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself, but with its subject. 3

... I neer found so many beauties in the Sonnets -- they seem to be full of fine things said unintentionally -- in the intensity of working out conceits. 4

It is much easier to say what transparency is or what transparency should be than it is to say how it works. We must begin with the admission that part of the responsibility, again, rests with the reader. The reader must first of all accept that he may look at words, whatever their arrangement,

1. "These remarks," as F.O. Matthiessen says, were included in an unpublished lecture...." Cited by Matthiessen, The Achievement of T.S. Eliot, third edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp.89-90. The anonymous reviewer of "Burnt Norton" in the TLS, picked up Eliot's statement about "ransparency." Times Literary Supplement, September 14, 1940, in T.S. Eliot: Four Quartets, A Casebook, ed. Bernard Bergonzi (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1969), pp.32-35.
2. Forman, ed., Letters, p.384-85.
3. Forman, ed., Letters, p.96.
4. Forman, ed., Letters, p.65.

style, or imagery, and see "through" them. If the reader is willing, and is sensitive enough to words, then everything depends upon the poet. The poet's design upon the reader, ideally, would be to convey his meaning or experience without the words distracting. He would necessarily rely upon a conceptual notion similar to Hobbes's statement that "there is no conception in a man's mind, which hath not at first, totally, or by parts, been begotten upon the organs of sense."<sup>1</sup> If the poet wants the reader to see through his words to the experience, he must begin with the simple and unadorned word or image.

Susanne Langer has a clear explanation and example of what I mean in her discussion of the transparent symbol:

A symbol which interests us also as an object is distracting. It does not convey its meaning without obstruction.... The more barren and indifferent the symbol, the greater is its semantic power. Peaches are too good to act as words; we are too much interested in peaches themselves. But little noises are ideal conveyors of concepts, for they give us nothing but their meaning. That is the source of the "transparency" of language.... Vocables in themselves are so worthless that we cease to be aware of their physical presence at all, and become conscious only of their connotations, denotations, or other meanings. Our conceptual activity seems to flow through them, rather than merely accompany them, as it accompanies other experiences we endow with significance. 2

One word alone will not suffice to make us feel or see into an experience; only combinations of words may do that. The word "peach" alone might do little towards our seeing and feeling the peach, but, if as in Keats's description of eating a nectarine, the combinations fuse together, then we see and feel through the words:

Talking of Pleasure, this moment I was writing with one hand, and with the other holding to my Mouth a Nectarine -- good god how fine. It went down soft pulpy, slushy cozy -- all its delicious embonpoint melted down my throat like a large beatified Strawberry. 3

The words flow from the one hand holding the nectarine into the other writing.

Berryman's principle of transparent writing in Love & Fame depends partly on the principle of transparency which is implicit in Keats's

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1. Hobbes, Leviathan, p.7.
  2. Susanne K. Langer, Philosophy in a New Key (New York: The New American Library, 1951), p.73.
  3. Forman, ed., Letters, p.393.

description, spontaneous intensity. When Berryman quoted the line from The Tempest, he said that the height or burst was at the beginning and ending of the line with "something way low-keyed down in the middle." Compare the pace of Keats's description "good god how fine" (height), "It went down" (low-keyed), "soft pulpy, slushy, oozy" (height). I have given several examples, using Berryman's principle, of how the style of Love & Fame aims at quick bursts punctuated with calm so as to give a sense of rhythm, not metrically necessarily, which plays upon the reader's senses and gives a feeling of moving with the words, what the words say, seeing through them. I recall one short example:

Jonquils respond with wit to the teasing breeze.

(L. & F., p.91)

The rhythmical flow of the words (calm, burst, calm) resembles, in principle, Keats's description of eating a nectarine (burst, calm, burst), but Berryman's words do not appeal to the senses as directly as Keats's do. We do not see the jonquils simply because he names them; the rhythms carry the reader along but he does not necessarily see the image. It seems that Berryman was attempting two things: to latch on to something concrete and to suggest movement. And this movement from a concrete ("jonquils") in his appeal to the senses which leaps headlong into a thought ("wit") and back again ("breeze"). This sense of spontaneity is a sort of hybrid of image, sound, and thought: "Jonquils respond," almost an image balances nicely in sound with "teasing breeze," again almost an image, and "with wit" repeats the initial "w" sound, almost spondee, and inclines towards thought-- wit is an act of the mind, but also a response to experience.

Surely Berryman had Wordsworth's "daffodils" in mind, his "jocund company." (The jonquil is in the family of the daffodil.) But unlike Wordsworth's daffodils which are "fluttering and dancing in the breeze,"

and to which Wordsworth's "heart with pleasure fills, / And dances with the daffodils,"<sup>1</sup> Berryman's jonquills "respond with wit"; they are at odds with rather than joining with the breeze in a blissful dance of harmony. The breeze of Berryman's imagination "teases"; his imagination buffets against and crackles. To see how Berryman's imagination will not allow harmony to take hold, the whole stanza must be quoted:

Who am I worthless that You spent such pains  
and take my pains again?  
I do not understand; but I believe.  
Jonquills respond with wit to the teasing breeze.

(L. & F., p.91)

As I have suggested, in part the transparency of these lines is achieved in Berryman's directness in the first three lines set in tension with the last line. But the juxtaposition of these last two lines also "tease." On the one hand, in the third line, he says that his mind rests in faith ("I believe"); on the other, in the fourth line, he suggests that his imagination will not allow rest, even in faith. Both style and juxtaposition correspond to his real state of mind. Like Eliot's "intersection of the timeless with time," Berryman can take comfort in only points in time, as in his moment of conversion, "My double nature fused in that point of time..." (my italics) (L. & F., p.89).

Even Berryman's direct and unadorned style conforms to the rhythmical pattern of burst and calm. For example, "It seems to be DARK all the time" (L. & F., p.77) begins low-keyed, then bursts with an emphasis, "DARK," and ends low-keyed. Or again in the same poem, "Crackles! in darkness HOPE; disappears" (L. & F., p.71); the line is like a series of rifle shots, almost a violence similar to that of Hopkins's, from whom Berryman might very well have derived his notion of transparency (I am

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1. William Wordsworth, Wordsworth: Poetical Works (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), p.149.

thinking of Hopkins's interplay of heavy and light stresses). Compare the opening line of one of Hopkins's "terrible sonnets" with the above examples: "I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day."<sup>1</sup> The same motions, low-keyed, heightening, low-keyed, take us beyond the poetry into the Hopkins's experience.

Berryman's notion of heightening, snapping at something low-keyed, not only suggests his transparent style, but also points to a transparency of form, a form which fluctuates between burst and calm, a form that eats itself up, or in Shelley's phrase, "a sword of lightning, ever unsheathed, which consumes the scabbard that would contain it."<sup>2</sup> Before he wrote Love & Fame, fairly tight, but original, forms had always been an important aspect of his art, and it is tempting to say that he abandoned form altogether in Love & Fame. But he was no less conscious of form than before: he was using his new "formlessness" to a different advantage. He said that his "lyric form" in Love & Fame "had its genesis in a study" (L. & F., p.95) of Emily Dickinson's verse. Someone has described Emily Dickinson's verse as not so much verse as something hacked out with a hatchet, and the same aptly applies to Berryman's verse in Love & Fame. Berryman, according to William Heyen, said that the "origin of his new style" was based on Dickinson's "unrhymed quatrains... w<sup>ith</sup> a short 4th line."<sup>3</sup> Perhaps what Heyen meant was that Berryman used unrhymed quatrains because the great majority of Dickinson's quatrains are rhymed. And, too, Dickinson uses the short fourth line as sparingly as Berryman does in Love & Fame. Perhaps Berryman's saying that his new style took its "genesis" in Emily Dickinson's poetry tells us all we need to know; her spontaneous, nervous, deceptively chatty, understated style certainly reminds us of Love & Fame. (It should be noted in passing that Berryman says in Love & Fame he had

1. Gerard Manley Hopkins, Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, third edition, ed. W.H. Gardner (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), p.109.
2. Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," English Critical Essays: Nineteenth Century, ed. Edmund D. Jones (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p.117.
3. Heyen, "John Berryman: A Memoir and an Interview," p.51.

learned something from John Aubrey's spontaneous style in Brief Lives (L. & F., p.327). Berryman seems to have emulated Dickinson's poetry in his saying "with precision everything that most matters" (L. & F., p.83), but with a quality in Ivor Winter's description of Dickinson's poetry, of "the inexplicable fact of change, of the absolute cleavage between successive states of being...."<sup>1</sup> Successive states of being in Emily Dickinson's poems usually come in quatrain blocks, each quatrain smoothly or sharply precise. Berryman's quatrains, on the other hand, are erratic, long and short lines within each quatrain suggesting rapidly shifting states of being:

Ah! so very slowly  
the jammed dock slides away backward,  
I'm on my way to Bumpus' & the Cam,  
haunts of the old masters where I may improve.

(L. & F., p.43)

I have travelled in some high company since  
less dizzily.  
I have had some rare girls since but never one so philosophical  
as that same Spring (my last Spring there) Jean Bennett.

(L. & F., p.28)

"... Would you sometime write me out a verse or two & sign it?"  
O my brave dear lady, yes I will.  
This is it.  
I certainly will miss at 6:25 p.m. you.

(L. & F., p.77)

But the one who made me wild  
was who she let take naked photographs  
never she showed me but she was proud of.  
Unnerving; dire.

(L. & F., p.19)

I have purposely chosen examples in which the first, second, third, and fourth lines are short. The effect of these short lines is either to heighten or to calm feeling. The short lines in the first two examples are low-keyed "less dizzily" rounds out his expression of an understated feeling; but "Ah! so very slowly" contrasts sharply with the longer line which follows,

1. Ivor Winters, In Defense of Reason, 3rd edition (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1947), p.293.

"the jammed dock slides away backward." The short third and fourth lines of the last two examples burst out of stanza: "This is it" and "Unnerving; dire."

Berryman's short lines very often set apart a collision within the quatrain and suggest sharply the cleavage between views of Berryman. He remembers that an old friend once said Berryman was "bloody-minded," and Berryman responds,

I will also roar you as 'twere any sucking dove  
these twilight days  
but I was hell young.  
I did not censor anything I said....

(L. & F., p.52)

The calm image "twilight days" set against the heightened "hell young," gives the effect of the present self protesting against the past self. Again in the same poem, two short lines contrast, a flat second line and a shouting fourth line:

When I was fiddling later with every wife  
on the Eastern seaboard  
I longed to climb into a pulpit & confess.  
Tear me to pieces!

(L. & F., p.52)

These fluctuating juxtapositions and shifting lines, which give a sense of eating up form, convey just the effect Berryman would want: to show through an uncertain, self-contradictory personality in search of harmony. Not until we come to the Part Three do we find any one poem settling into a steady quatrain and even there we find only two poems in a structured ballad quatrains, which suggest a harmony of sympathy and security. In "Death Ballad" Berryman feels sympathetically into the wrecked lives of "Tyson & Jo" who at nineteen "became convinced it was no go"; and he concludes,

... no power on earth can prevent their dying. That is so.  
Only, Jo & Tyson, Tyson & Jo,

take up, outside your blocked selves, some small thing  
that is moving  
& wants to keep on moving  
& needs therefore, Tyson, Jo, your loving.

(L. & F., p.74)

It is as though Berryman hoped that by naming these two tortured souls he would calm them and through his form give them harmony. Form in "Home Ballad" suggests Berryman's own sense of harmony in his home:

It's home to my daughter I am come  
with verses & stories true,  
which I would also share with you,  
my dear, my dear,  
only you are not my daughter.

....  
It's Love & Fame called, honey Kate,  
you read it from the start  
and sometimes I reel when you praise my art  
my honey almost hopeless angry art,  
which was both our Fate --

(L. & F., p.80)

Berryman's "almost hopeless angry art" is found outside the poem or in the act of making a poem; his art consumes him outside his home. But in his ballad, the form "contains" his turbulence just as his home eases it.

In Part Four, the unrhymed quatrains begin to settle. The lines vary less in length, but with just enough evenness to suggest his uneasy harmony with God. Short lines, when they do occur, often suggest calm:

Yours is the crumpling, to my sister-in-law terrifying thunder,  
yours the candelabra buds sticky in Spring  
Christ's mercy....

(L. & F., p.85)

But questions will not be suppressed, and a short line serves as emphasis:

Across the ages certain blessings swarm,  
horrors accumulate, the best men fail:  
Socrates, Lincoln, Christ mysterious  
Who can search Thee out?

(L. & F., p.87)

Berryman's diction too aims at transparency, words and phrases which suggest that same general explosive quality in Love & Fame. When

he asks God; "Oil all my turbulences," the verb "oil" might at first suggest a balm, but he is also asking God to lubricate his turbulences so that they might be used, an expression of his "double nature," (that cleavage between successive states of being) both wanting rest and needing intensity. Slangy or seemingly inappropriate words burst into several meanings; when he calls God a "delicious author" he means of course he is an "excellent author"; "author" not only suggests God as Logos, so does "delicious," that is, "reasoning" God through the senses, as in the prayer, "O taste and see how gracious [i.e. Grace] the Lord is." In the same poem Berryman says he "fell back in love" with God; but his common turn of phrase also suggests that the Fall has brought him back to God. The stanza continues with a sexual pun "come on me again" (L. & F., p.93); taken out of context this pun might seem crude, but in context it is hardly noticeable, a passing Donnean reference to Christ as the Bridegroom. As M.C. D'Arcy says of such sexual punning in prayers: sexual puns are not evidence of concealed passion but are "the overflow of emotions into the body": "The touch of God is entirely spiritual, and the soul is touched at its source below the level of its activities of thought and will."<sup>1</sup>

Related to diction, but owing no less to Berryman's explosiveness which aims at transparency, is Berryman's humor, that "sense of humour/fatal to bardic pretension" (L. & F., p.19). Appropriately, Berryman's jonquils would "respond with wit to the teasing breeze" (L. & F., p.91). One critic, Mark Schorer, has suggested that Berryman's "comic tone" is the "only shield he permits between us and his hellish rage, the saving distance."<sup>2</sup> (Schorer also notes Berryman's "transparency," "... the experience behind the poem became so nearly the aesthetic surface itself...."<sup>3</sup>) Louis L. Martz has referred to Berryman's humor as a "wry sincerity."<sup>4</sup> Berryman's

1. M.C. D'Arcy, "Preface," The Poems of St. John of the Cross, trans. Roy Campbell (London: The Harvill Press, Ltd., 1952), p.7.
2. Schorer, "The Lonely Calm," p.92.
3. ibid.
4. Martz, "Recent Poetry: Berryman and Others," p.413.

humor would draw different responses; his humor serves to cut through high rhetoric and grand figures and to draw the reader into the poem with the poet to observe and participate, for humor suggests an objectivity and intimacy. This sort of tender domesticity (Berryman says that he is "domestic" with his "Muse" L. & F., p.197) avoids pomposity and insincerity, a humor Douglas Dunn sums up, which "heightened his serious moods, adding an awkward earnestness."<sup>1</sup>

John Bayley has said of The Dream Songs that it has a sort of pruzhina, or a "sprung interior" in which the bits under tension... keep the parts apart and the dimensions open and inviting."<sup>2</sup> The same would seem to be true of Love & Fame and would account for one critic's response, "I find it difficult to keep my own response... still."<sup>3</sup> These responses would have pleased Berryman, for they seem to me exactly what he intended. But this tension, this sense of "leaving the ends aft open" in Berryman's poetry, as I have argued, orders itself into a dynamic whole, so that, when we see the whole, his poetry has that quality of enigmatic completeness. Enigmas, ambivalence, tension, all are the poems' means of coming to life and are also the very energy of the life we all lead. As an epilogue praising and summarizing the life of Berryman's art, I offer some lines from his confère, of another age, Wordsworth:

The mind of man is framed even like the breath  
And harmony of music; there is a dark  
Invisible workmanship that reconciles  
Discordant elements, and makes them move  
In one society. Ah me! that all  
The terrors, all the early miseries,

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1. Dunn, "Gaiety & Lamentation," p.77.
  2. Bayley, "On John Berryman," p.88.
  3. Edward Neill, "Ambivalence of John Berryman: An Interim Report," Critical Quarter 17, XVI (Autumn 1974), 275.

Regrets, vexations, lassitudes, that all  
The thoughts and feeling which have been infused  
Into my mind, should ever have made up  
The calm existence that is mine when I  
Am worthy of myself! Praise to the end!  
Thanks likewise for the means! 1

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1. Wordsworth, The Prelude: A Parallel Text (I, 351-363, 1805 version), pp.52, 54.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

BERRYMAN'S NOTES TO KEATS'S LETTERS\*

[Facing page of back cover]

nor Donne nor Blake

'I hate the world' 362, 452, 503  
'if I fail I should die hard'  
371, 468

cf. on Edinburgh 413  
the Blackwood attack: (215-6)-  
v. gay letter, yet inconceivable  
he'd not seen article yet; yet a letter  
tortured over Tom. 312-3(4)  
433

his friends! Esp. Woodhouse! 226-7!  
Fanny Br. 249, 254, 357

his maturing 461  
humour, 324-5

507\*\*

'brave enough to volunteer for uncomfortable hours' (56)  
- 'a search after Truth' (56) - 'what the imagination  
seizes as Beauty must be truth' (67) - '... intensity, capable  
259- of making all disagreeables evaporate..' (71)-  
(426) 'negative Capability' (72)- '..unobtrusive..' (96)- 'sh'd  
492-3 surprise by a fine excess and not by Singularity....never be  
halfway...Leaves to a Tree..' (108)- 'the innumerable  
499 compositions & decompositions....' (129) - 'there is really  
a grand march of intellect' (144)- 'It has no character...  
the camelion Poet...' (227)- 'Passion I have for the  
Beautiful..made one with the ambition of my intellect' (241)  
'a miserable & mighty Poet of the human heart' (346)\*\*\*  
'art' vs. 'the true voice of feeling' (384-5) cf. 425

'dullness' of letters. 253 e.g.

cockneyism 380

on early apprec. 75 (cf. of TSE)

a good conj. by Rev. M.R. Ridley (ugh): 123 (&247)- conj. p. 429  
391

cf. Homage! 107 & earlier; 259; 322-495!

309 = Stalin (Porteus > Hasl. > JK) ==

\* Based on Berryman's copy: Maurice Buxton Forman, ed. The Letters of John Keats, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1935). These are some notes throughout Berryman's copy, but his own index on the facing page of the back cover and the inside back cover give sufficient information about his interests.

\*\* The "Keats to Shelley" epigraph to His Toy, His Dress, His Rest is on this page.

\*\*\* incorrect page number; should be p.347.

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the vocation &amp; purpose: 10, 21, 26-7

vs. gov't 20 &amp; cf. 30 (vs. religion); cf. 174; 234

Shak. 21, 25, 31, 65, 72, 305, 308

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60, 111, 130!

155, 246, 301 anti-clerical, 317

F. Br. 7

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then decis. for magazines 390-2-5-6; depression 432 STC 324

writing habits 38! on writing 277; 339, 432-3-44

on his own art: 96, 108 (vowels), 217 ('those abstractions wh. are my only life'),

Endym. 51 222-3 226! 228 440 plans

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Wordsworth 144

(Hunt 252 esp.)

Hazlitt 264, 310

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Byron 405! 413, 521

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reality 145, 397!

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Lamia 402

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&amp;T.S.E.

have no

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APPENDIX B

A SHORT CONCORDANCE TO THE DREAM SONGS

The following concordance comprises not only key-words but also important themes and symbols. It is by no means comprehensive, but it should give some idea of the depth and breadth of the Songs. I have given only the song number after each entry.

After life:

18, 90, 132, 237.

Alone:

See Lonely.

America, Americans:

2, 13, 18, 22, 23, 31, 36, 37, 38, 39, 48, 78, 121, 146-158, 172, 173, 180, 187, 193, 195, 210, 211, 213, 216, 217, 218, 219, 235, 267, 280, 290, 292, 302, 304, 308, 309, 314, 324, 346, 348, 357, 378, 384.

Art:

See Creative.

Baby:

See Daughter.

Bear, Bare:

1, 11, 34, 36, 45, 59, 74, 75, 120, 166, 188, 199, 202, 236, 240, 243, 259, 263, 291, 302, 356, 372, 374, 378, 381.

Bed:

1, 8, 11, 40, 54, 317.

Birth, Rebirth, Birthday:

28, 39, 109, 124, 200, 261, 270, 272, 287, 307, 324, 347, 353, 356.

Body:

7, 8, 65, 78, 80, 81, 84, 111, 121, 165, 185, 198, 247, 274, 284, 308, 341, 345, 365, 368, 373, 382.

Broken:

See Pieces.

Cave:

See Hole.

Childhood:

See Youth.

Christ:

See God.

**Christmas, Thanksgiving:**

35, 61, 65, 124, 163, 200, 234, 309, 376, 377, 385.

**Circles, Cycles:**

14, 17, 18, 27, 54, 75, 99, 121, 166, 182, 259, 261, 366.

**Civilization, Surroundings, the World:**

1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16, 19, 22, 23, 26, 30, 31, 35, 41, 45, 46, 53, 56, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 66, 74, 77, 91, 92, 97, 99, 102, 105, 110, 113, 125, 126, 135, 140, 146, 147, 149, 162, 164, 178, 181, 197, 199, 200, 203, 210, 217, 223, 227, 233, 245, 248, 275, 279, 280, 290, 302, 304, 313, 321, 331, 332, 339, 348, 353, 354, 357, 361, 363, 378.

**Cold, Snow, Winter:**

9, 11, 28, 30, 41, 42, 65, 77, 85, 108, 120, 124, 132, 141, 174, 186, 189, 200, 209, 247, 272, 288, 383.

**Cosmos:**See Galaxy.**Court:**See Trial.**Creative, Art, Poetry:**

11, 14, 26, 30, 38, 43, 50, 54, 71, 75, 77, 78, 79, 85, 88, 92, 94, 103, 115, 125, 126, 148, 156, 159, 166, 177, 201, 205, 207, 208, 211, 221, 257, 258, 260, 261, 267, 271, 274, 279, 280, 281, 284, 287, 293, 296, 297, 308, 310, 311, 323, 328, 333, 347, 352, 354, 356, 362, 366, 369, 379.

**Dancing:**

2, 27, 35, 141, 164, 186, 205, 243, 284, 382.

**Darkness, Night, Fear:**

12, 28, 49, 55, 65, 67, 85, 89, 90, 92, 99, 103, 110, 125, 192, 209, 211, 212, 221, 232, 267, 274, 283, 309, 318, 320, 347, 358, 383.

**Daughter, Baby, Son:**

33, 40, 54, 56, 67, 72, 97, 109, 124, 127, 131, 132, 175, 186, 249, 271, 283, 293, 298, 303, 308, 324, 330, 333, 354, 373, 379, 383, 385.

**Dawn:**

29, 65, 90, 96, 139, 140, 145, 174, 199, 221, 268, 324, 383, 384.

**Death, Death Wish:**

10, 11, 18, 21, 26, 27, 28, 30, 36, 39, 40, 41, 46, 48, 49, 53, 56, 61, 67, 76, 81, 82, 83, 86, 88, 89, 90, 111, 112, 119, 120, 122, 123, 127, 129, 130, 144, 146, 156, 159, 175, 177, 185, 190, 191, 196, 199, 205, 208, 259, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 279, 286, 288, 324, 325, 326, 331, 335, 359, 365, 373, 377, 380, 382.

**Digging, Radar:**

2, 5, 7, 21, 63, 91, 111, 148, 185, 207, 268, 348, 368, 384.

**Dreams:**

49, 90, 101, 109, 122, 132, 135, 137, 178, 197, 263, 292, 299, 317,  
319, 327, 365.

**Drink (Whisky, etc.):**

14, 15, 43, 44, 55, 65, 91, 92, 96, 98, 100, 134, 199, 211, 225, 232,  
275, 300, 305, 311, 313, 339, 350, 351, 356, 365.

**Ears:**

8, 27, 41, 42, 78, 81, 89, 97, 128, 147, 166, 203, 204, 243, 269, 278,  
343, 356.

**East:**

112, 123, 169, 274, 279.

**Eating:**

See Hunger.

**Enemies:**

8, 9, 10, 16, 116, 120, 132, 162, 294, 352, 365, 366, 374.

**Eyes:**

8, 22, 29, 77, 78, 89, 91, 166, 373.

**Fall:**

1, 17, 20, 77, 113, 141, 144, 183, 191, 199, 200, 228, 253, 275, 281,  
293, 306, 309, 327, 382, 384, 385.

**Fame:**

66, 71, 90, 118, 133, 152, 214, 279, 287, 340, 341, 342, 343.

**Fate:**

5, 6, 9, 12, 13, 25, 36, 42, 49, 72, 84, 87, 113, 120, 131, 137, 138,  
156, 171, 179, 190, 191, 196, 199, 200, 209, 228, 247, 261, 266, 271,  
272, 279, 290, 302, 314, 330, 347, 355, 357, 359, 361, 370, 375.

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6, 34, 42, 43, 45, 76, 143, 145, 174, 228, 235, 241, 292, 357, 384.

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12, 28, 40, 49, 51, 61, 81, 85, 91, 120, 140, 173, 184, 185, 226, 262,  
266, 268, 296, 299, 330, 379. (See also Darkness).

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352, 355, 359, 366, 367, 379, 380, 383, 384.**Lady:**See Wife.**Layers, Folds:**

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**Lonely, Alone, Solitude:**11, 17, 28, 40, 52, 91, 94, 111, 114, 118, 152, 174, 201, 203, 209,  
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19, 29, 39, 42, 44, 51, 59, 61, 111, 116, 135, 162, 235, 236, 237, 271, 316, 348, 351, 352.

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267, 281, 282, 312, 313, 324, 334.**Pride, Pried:**

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South :

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Spring :

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34, 127, 136, 172, 204, 235, 310.

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12, 27, 28, 52, 114, 123, 140, 186, 213, 279, 284, 290, 372, 373, 378.

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**Winter:**

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**Women:**

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**Woods:**

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**Work:**

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309, 318, 337, 357, 379, 383.

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**Youth, Childhood, Childishness:**

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