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"A Half-Closed Book": Abjection in John Berryman's The Dream Songs

by

Carmen Ruth Wittmeier 

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of English

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Carmen Wittmeier

3312 Breton Bay N.W.
Calgary, Alberta
T2L 1X5

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University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled, "A Half-Closed Book": Abjection in John Berryman's The Dream Songs, submitted by Carmen Ruth Wittmeier in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Prof. M. O'Driscoll

Prof. B. Almon

Prof. E.D. Blodgett

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Abstract

This thesis addresses the issues of identity, religion, language, and biography in John Berryman's The Dream Songs in relation to Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection--the "improper" and "unclean"--in Powers of Horror. Exploring the disintegration that occurs throughout the text, it asserts that Berryman attempts to create a multifarious speaking subject unhindered by patriarchal, teleological, rigidly ordered forms of writing and speech. The introductory chapter outlines the controversies surrounding Berryman, while the first chapter addresses the poet's methodical destruction of the homogeneous subject formed by Old Testament Law in its attempts to banish the abject. The second chapter addresses Berryman's rebellion against the New Testament's emphasis on the introjection of the abject and the faulty biblical notions of Christ. The final chapter concerns Berryman's problematic syntax and his attempts to establish balance between "the symbolic," the order of the Father, and "the semiotic," the preverbal, pre-Oedipal, unconscious realm of the maternal.

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Reference Abbreviations

BG Mancini, The Berryman Gestalt

BS Berryman, Sonnets

CC Haffenden, A Critical Commentary

CP Berryman, Collected Poems

DH Berryman, We Dream of Honour

DP Berryman, The Dispossessed

DS Berryman, The Dream Songs

FP Berryman, The Freedom of the Poet

HF Berryman, Henry's Fate

PH Kristeva, Powers of Horror

RE Berryman, Recovery

RP Kristeva, Revolution in Poetic Language

INTRODUCTION: "HIS FOES ARE LIKE FOOTNOTES"

In The Confessional Poets, a study published a year following the death of John Berryman, Robert Phillips examines what he believes to be a major development in American literature in the latter half of the twentieth century: the emergence of the "confessional" poem and the "confessional" poet.[1] In his attempt to characterize this movement, Phillips observes that the "subjects explored in confessional poetry are rarely beautiful" (xi), and that the language is "frequently less so" (xii). The overall product, he declares, rarely conforms to the expectation generally placed upon poetry--namely, that it should embody beautiful or high thought through "appropriate" language (xi). Furthermore, the "current autobiographical frenzy" upon which confessional poetry is based is notable for its use of the "mundane" as "a base for poetic construction" (xii). The reader, in other words, must accept the notion that "there are no inherently poetic or unpoetic materials--only sensibilities which render materials into poetry" (xii).

In a subsequent chapter entitled "John Berryman's Literary Offenses," Phillips critiques the poet's major work, The Dream Songs, describing it as a collection of confessional poems "dumped on the world" (92). Ignoring Berryman's claim that the work is based on the experiences of its fictitious main character, Henry, the poet's belief that the word "confessional" generally "doesn't mean anything," and his "rage and contempt" at being labeled a "confessional poet" (Stitt "Art" 21), Phillips maintains that the poems are inarguably confessions, defending his claim by noting that "Henry has a daughter, as did Berryman," and traveled to Ireland at the same time that "Berryman was

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[1] A term popularized by the critic M.L. Rosenthal, who eventually deemed it too limited despite its convenience, recognizing the potential damage caused by the very conception of a confessional school (Phillips xi).

on the ship" (93). When evaluating the quality of the Songs, Phillips argues that the first volume of the collection, 77 Dream Songs, appears to be the work "of some randy contender," and is marked by its "twisted syntax" and the "sheer sloppiness" of its sequences. Although he admits that Berryman's second volume, His Toy, His Dream, His Rest, can be said to emanate "a great shimmer of beauty" (92), Phillips declares that the Songs as a whole "have had a disproportionate number of admirers" (98), many of which have been too lavish in their praise of the poetry.

Shifting his attention to Love & Fame, Phillips states that the collection displays an "immoral callowness" (97), and that the techniques and material "which had been latently bad" in The Dream Songs, become "outrageously so" in this subsequent work (98). These poems, Phillips declares, reveal "much of what is wrong with bad confessional poetry" and can be used to educate a reader as to "what makes a confessional poem go wrong" (98). "Mr. Berryman," he continues, seems to know "sadly little" of love, creating a catalogue of sexual performances "without passion or personal commitment" to values other than "satisfying the itch," a tendency, Phillips concludes, that "is indicative of the poet's total lack of commitment to other higher values" (99). Berryman's literary offenses include "dropping names as readily as he says he drops his trousers" and committing the sin of hubris, a crime which "has been the downfall of greater men than he" (99). With his "heavy hands," he creates numerous poems which are "mawkish at best" (100), and others with a rhetoric so "convoluted" that it "actually bars direct communication" (102). Not only is Berryman's use of "rhetoric and glib abbreviations and slang" often ineffective (100), but his relationship with God and his view of Christianity are problematic and unconvincing. The poet, Phillips states, is so occupied with "noticing Berryman" that he fails to perceive God (103). His "formidable ego" has never been "sufficiently doubtful or suffered the mental disquietude which would trigger . . . a full-scale embracing of Christianity" (104).

To casually suggest that John Berryman has been the subject of both controversy and misunderstanding is to make a gross understatement. The poet's reputation can be described, as Harry Thomas observes, as "fluctuating and fractious," for the "spectrum of opinion" concerning his poetry "is breathtaking" (xvii). At one extreme, critics such as Adrienne Rich and John Unterecker celebrate Berryman as a master,[2] while at the other, individuals such as Robert Phillips and Hayden Carruth celebrate the poet's didactic function, using Berryman's supposed innumerable vices to exhibit the way in which to avoid becoming a dismal poetic failure.[3]

The Dream Songs, a poem published in its complete form in 1969, has been a central subject of dispute. Although few critics resort to Phillips's dissection of the work into its "faulty" components, various complaints have been voiced concerning its language and structure. In his review of 77 Dream Songs, for example, Robert Lowell describes the poems as "sloppier" than those of the "wonderfully wrung and wrought" Homage to Mistress Bradstreet ("Poetry" 107), and states that the Songs are "much too difficult, packed, and wrenched to be sung" (108). Although he admits to eventually

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[2]In "Living With Henry," Rich recognizes Berryman's status as "*the* master poet of this half-century" for many (127), while Unterecker concludes, in his foreward to John Berryman: An Introduction to the Poetry, that the risks Berryman takes are extraordinary," while "his accomplishments are those of a master" (xix).

[3]In "Love, Art, and Money," Carruth criticizes Berryman's "schoolboyish bragging," his "muddlement of crude desires," and his rhymes which have always been "uninteresting, [and] sometimes awful" (214). Describing the poet as a "boasting, equivocating secularist," Carruth observes that while the other poets in Berryman's generation have been "making poetry," Berryman has been preoccupied with self-advertisement and "making language twisted and posed" (218).

surrendering "to the crazy joy" of Henry's "queer baby talk," a form of speech that he initially found "insufferable," Lowell concludes that 77 Dream Songs is a "hazardous, imperfect book" (111). Harbouring similar complaints, Paul Ramsey observes that "almost every poem is badly flawed in one way or another" (936), while Hayden Carruth concludes that Berryman's "ability to wrench syntax" has "damned little to do with poetry in general," and confesses that he sees "nothing else [of value] in his work" (215). Gary Q. Arpin, in turn, criticizes Berryman's frequent inclusion of "trivial experiences" and the poet's ineffective use of "minor aspects of his life" in the Songs (61), while William J. Martz asserts that "Berryman made a serious mistake in not culling the Dream Songs more carefully" and discarding the "inferior" poems (36).

However, other critics have voiced radically different opinions, disagreeing with these assessments and other common criticisms, and often even perceiving strengths in what have been deemed weaknesses in Berryman's poetry. The result is a confluence of discordant voices engaged in perpetual dispute, contradicting each other in a manner that Berryman, a man of considerable tension himself, would have undoubtedly approved of. Lowell's view of 77 Dream Songs as a "hazardous and imperfect" work, for example, must be placed beside A. Alvarez's assessment of it as "an utterly original work" (90). While the poet's use, or abuse, of syntax irritates Lowell, the abnormality of the language "creates new meanings, new rhythms, [and] a kind of suspense," according to Marguerite Harris (ii). Conflict also arises concerning the nature of the Songs and the structure, or lack thereof, of the work in its entirety. Whereas Phillips argues that the Songs are incontrovertibly confessions, John Unterecker states that confession is "the last thing Berryman is interested in" (xix). While Edward Mendelson states that the poems are both dreams and "'Songs'" that are "often musical" (54), Lowell declares that the poems are not real dreams and that they "are called *songs* out of mockery" ("Poetry" 108). Andrew Hudgins, in turn, assumes a more compromising stance, recognizing that the phrase "dream song" unites two antithetical terms, and, arguing that the Songs are formed from

both unconscious and conscious truths, involve a certain degree of self-mockery on the part of their poetic persona, Henry (94). In terms of the work's structure, Martz argues that the random "arithmetic"--the numbers of lines, poems, and sections used to form the Songs--clearly accentuates its lack of plot and the absence of "a final imaginative coherence" (36), while Mendelson states that a deliberate "arithmetical precision surrounds the songs" (54).[4] The views of both critics are challenged by Jerry McGuire, who observes that judging a work by its organic structure or singleness of effect may be "irrelevant in works that question the integrity of consciousness and the initiating role of the author" (175).

The Dream Songs is, inarguably, an enigmatic, elusive work whose internal contradictions and ambiguities evoke external conflicts, creating a domino effect of reactions and endless counteractions. Instead of merely voicing my opinion on the issues raised, and therefore joining the seemingly endless banter, I believe that it is more productive to question what evokes such contradictory opinions in the work, and to determine the purpose of Berryman's provocative use of language. Rather than directly wrestling with the question of whether Berryman's syntax is successful or ineffective, or whether the work as a whole is cohesive or flawed, I believe that it is more beneficial to examine why Berryman employs, whether deliberately or unconsciously, such unusual rhetorical and syntactical devices, and to question why the Songs are simultaneously organized and self-contained, chaotic and unbounded. Furthermore, instead of attempting to determine the degree to which the personalities and experiences of Henry and

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[4]Mendelson defends his argument by examining Berryman's use of the number seven: there are, he argues, "seventy-seven songs in the first volume," "fourteen (7 + 7) in the Op. Posth. series that opens the second volume, His Toy, His Dream, His Rest (1968); seven epigraphs; seven books in all" (54).

Berryman correlate, or to needlessly toy with the problematic term "confessional." I feel that it is necessary to examine why there is considerable confusion concerning the relationship between Henry and his creator, and why Berryman himself is unable to either identify with, or extricate himself from, the main character of the Songs.

The Dreams Songs is, I believe, centered on the theme of disintegration. Henry, its poetic persona, is placed in a bewildering position, for he is expected to make sense of a collapsing modern world as it suffers a breakdown in its foundational, patriarchal religious metanarratives. Furthermore, he must survive despite his shattered conception of God and his father, the suicides of those around him, and the insufficient nature of the language through which he is to express his grief. Despite clinging to the security of traditional conceptions of self, religion, and language, and struggling to return to the edenic world prior to his father's suicide, Henry is simultaneously compelled to rebel against his roots. He embraces the fragmentation of his identity, vents his rage at a merciless God, and molds and recreates language into a form that reflects the disintegration of his internal and external realities. The Dream Songs is, therefore, inevitably a work of paradox, contradiction, and ambiguity. Because it reflects the predicament in which Henry, in addition to his creator, has been placed, it is simultaneously optimistic, yet bleak; structured, yet chaotic; coherent, yet distorted; and musical, yet wrenched and cacophonous. Disintegration, the characteristic that Robert Lowell lists as the greatest weakness of the Songs, is not so much a flaw, but a reflection of the world out of which the poet and his work emerge.

There are, I believe, three major aspects of The Dream Songs which reflect the dramatic impact of the moral and spiritual degeneration recognized by the poet in his culture. The first category of disintegration concerns the poet's conception of the self: rather than being a unified, homogenous subject, Henry is divided into numerous conflicting identities. He is simultaneously his creator, yet a fictitious character who cannot be aligned with Berryman; is bestial, yet rational and even divine; is a saviour, yet

predatorial; and is a hero, yet the ultimate coward. The second category of disintegration features Henry's faith, for he perceives God as fragmented, views Christianity as a distorted faith, and becomes a fragmented and twisted, albeit plausible, saviour himself. The third, and most obvious category of disintegration and internal collapse is evident in the contorted, fragmented, and unusually expressive language of the Songs. Because the use of a linear, syntactical, and patriarchal language is insufficient for a heterogeneous subject whose faith in his father and religious foundations has collapsed, a new form of expression must be created--a language understood by the fragmented selves that constitute the whole. Each of these three major categories of disintegration, which I will now discuss in greater detail, overlap to some extent, merging, to the great confusion of critics, with Berryman's biographical "reality" and the external world.

"FALSE TISSUE FORMING"

In Berryman's Recovery, an incomplete manuscript published posthumously, Alan Severance, in his struggle to "keep in touch with [him]self" (21), and to salvage his true identity from the multiple selves that converge to form a fragmented, heterogeneous, and thoroughly confused whole, raises a striking physiological and philosophical problem concerning the "Recognition of 'Self'":

> Research in immunology has implications of far more importance than simply the development of new and better vaccines for protection against disease--important as that is. The whole question of how the body recognizes some substances as "self" and others as "not self" . . . has a vital bearing on the problem of transplanting tissues and organs from one individual to another. (22)

Understood metaphorically, this statement reveals Berryman's awareness of the difficulties involved in the process of self-discovery. The poet himself struggled to differentiate "self" from "not self," passing through "periods of adolescent amnesia, adoption, scholarly selflessness, Eliotic impersonality, and various personae" before

gradually coming "to discover who he was" (Thomas xvi). Severance's observation raises the issue of the relationship between biography and fiction, and the "imaginary" character and his creator. Not only is the poet faced with the daunting task of extricating his "self" from the personalities he has created, but faces the possibility that the ideas and images that he attempts to transplant from himself to another through poetry will not only be rejected, but overanalyzed by individuals who feel capable of positively identifying what constitutes the poet's "self."

Berryman, of course, has often deliberately placed himself at the center of controversy, even instigating the conflict surrounding his relationship with Henry. After provocatively declaring that it "is idle to reply to critics" in his introduction to The Dream Songs,[5] Berryman states that because some of the individuals who addressed 77 Dream Songs in the past "went so desperately astray," he is forced to clarify that the Songs are not biographical, but feature an "imaginary," fictitious character named Henry who is certainly "not the poet" (DS vi). It does not take Robert Phillips's astute observation that both Henry and Berryman had a daughter, and his conclusion that they must therefore be inextricably linked, to recognize the problematic nature of the poet's statement. Berryman himself has consistently undermined his own claim, inserting, for example, the term "Henry" in place of "*Me*" in his Paris Review interview (Stitt 33), and observing, in his Harvard Advocate interview, that it is Henry who has "thought up all these things" in the Songs "over the years," confusing, whether deliberately or unconsciously, the roles of the poet and his supposedly fictitious subject (Plotz 5). As if to further complicate matters, Berryman insisted, as Bawer observes, that the subject of his subsequent work, Love and

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[5]In his interview with Plotz, Berryman ironically states, following the publication of His Toy, His Dream, His Rest, that he will leave the question of his relationship with Henry "to the critics" (7).

Fame, was solely himself, and that he had removed all disguises from his work (163). Similarly, in his introductory note to Recovery, Berryman purposefully aligns himself with the novel's main character, Alan Severance,[6] stating that the "materials of the book . . . especially where hallucinatory, are historical; all facts are real; ladies and gentlemen, it's true" (viii).

Berryman's alter ego, Henry, is a provocative character himself, possessing numerous dynamic and willful identities. As Hudgins observes, Henry can barely contain the opposing personalities within him that "clash ferociously" and "do not synthesize or resolve, but rather exist in conflict, in ebb and flow, in cyclical movement" (93). Henry is, in The Dream Songs, both a "human American man" (13), and the bestial "Animal Henry" (351); is both "living & dead" (365); is "Perishable Henry," and yet "Imperishable Henry" (341); and is both "impenetrable Henry" (329), and "Punctured Henry" (380).[7] He is introduced as Henry House, Henry Cat, Pussycat, Henry of Donnybrook, Sir Henry, Henry Hankovitch, and Rabbi Henry, and is also, as Conarroe observes, "Mr. Bones, Sir Bones, Dr. Bones, Brother Bones, and Galahad" (92). Henry's boundaries are so fluid, and his identity so multifarious, that he even disintegrates physically, continuously seeping into his external environment and crumbling into pieces.

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[6]The choice of the name "Alan Severance" is both deliberate and revealing, and, like the phrase "dream song," is antithetical. As another character--a poet--in the novel observes, "Alan" means "*harmony*," while the character's surname reveals his identity as the "[t]earer-apart of people" and the "disrupter" (RE 41). His name, as the poet comments, "is against" him, for he can be called the "The Harmonious Inter-breaker" (41).

[7]Song numbers, rather than page references, will be used in citations from The Dream Songs.

In order to enhance the sense of disintegration created in the Songs and to blur the boundaries that separate the poet from Henry, Berryman frequently uses ambiguous pronouns. This strategy is evident in "The Ball Poem," an earlier poem in which Berryman describes a child's first encounter with the "epistemology of loss" (CP 11). Beginning with a description in the third person of a boy whose ball has been lost in a harbour, the poet shifts to the use of the first person singular. As Berryman comments in The Freedom of the Poet, the result is the discovery of how "a commitment of identity can be 'reserved'" through the use of an ambiguous pronoun:

> the poet himself is both left out and put in; the boy does and does not become him and we are confronted with a process which is at once a process of life and a process of art. A pronoun may seem a small matter, but she matters, he matters, it matters, they matter. Without this invention . . . I could not have written either of the two long poems that constitute the bulk of my work so far. (327)

This "invention" is pushed to its limits in The Dream Songs, for the pronoun "I," which Berryman suggests may refer to "the poet," "disappears into Henry's first and third persons" (FP 330), while Henry "talks to himself in the second person . . . about himself" (330). To further complicate matters, the name Henry is not only used in a singular sense, but acquires a plural form, as is evident in the statement, "Henry are/baffled," in the second Song. Furthermore, his gender is questionable, for in addition to assuming the feminine form in several Songs, he refers to himself as "itself" in Song 197.

Although Berryman, as Thomas observes, once approvingly quoted John Dewey's statement that to "maintain the integrity of the self is in the end the whole battle of life" (xv), he eventually came to the conclusion that the "universal notion of a continuity of individual personality" was less impressive than he had formerly imagined (FP 326). This realization, I believe, renders itself metaphorically in Recovery when Alan Severance is prompted to envision himself as an amphitheatre. Within his walls, he recognizes his "self," yet realizes that he must neglect this lone individual in order to encompass

numerous spectators and to put on shows "that are so interesting or difficult that they are put on again and again" (94). Berryman, with his internal and external spectators, arose, as McGuire observes, "from the ranks of the merely gifted when he became aware of what his subject was: what it had in fact been all along: the genesis, praxis, and exodus of a non-integral self as it scatters through the world" (177). With his paradoxical selves, Henry can, in turn, be seen as "modern man courageously oscillating from one side to the other of that proverbially thin line that separates genius from insanity" (Hudgins 93).

"HE CROSSED HIMSELF WITH HORROR"

Berryman's gradual rejection of a stable, homogeneous self is accompanied by his waning faith in the relevance, authority, logic, and applicability of religious doctrine based on patriarchal precepts. Assuming the identity of both a believer and a sceptic, and vacillating between quiet reflection, submission, despair, objective criticism, and outraged blasphemy, Henry possesses a fragmented spiritual identity. This division of the self is eloquently summarized in a Dream Song published posthumously, in which Henry openly acknowledges that his "doubts fight [his] faith," and even supports spiritual multiplicity, praying that his daughter's "skepticism" will not be eradicated as her faith grows, but will be permitted to live "amiabl[y] like lambs with her faith" (HF 54). Of course, Henry's multiple spiritual selves in The Dream Songs are generally not on such amicable terms, for excessive violence is an integral part of Henry's religious expression. Even his most sceptical selves collide: while one personality resorts to "bleak denial," another turns to "anti-potent rage" as the only recourse against God (DS 238); while one accuses God of maliciously gorging on human flesh, another criticizes him for exhibiting mercy and even takes justice into his own hands, slaughtering two adulterers in a brutal fashion despite the fact that Henry is, ironically, an adulterer himself.

The emotion that Henry exhibits in his attempts to come to terms with God is, understandably, both violent and excessive, for his conception of God is inextricably

linked to his conception of the human father that he lost as a child through the bewildering act of suicide. Even his own identity is coupled with that of his father's, for he is, as McGuire argues, "his own father in a hundred, a thousand, different masks," becoming "his own father and . . . his own mother, [in order] to create himself" (182). In another Song published posthumously in Henry's Fate, Berryman states that Henry's conception of God as a child has been altered by "wicked tricks" that have "surfaced into his I" (14), the "I" referring not only to his identity, but to his field of vision, for the wicked tricks affect the ability of his eye to perceive "the sky" and the form of God and his father "amidst his stars." "Evils," in other words, have "conned Henry sufficiently to blot or sour . . . the form of Father," causing his dreams to change and the painful question, "Could Father wrong[?]", to plague the "fearful, grown" Henry (14). Clearly, his father's act of suicide has not only been a critical factor in Henry's psychic disintegration, but has opened his "I" to the possibility of a fragmented God and a heterogeneous self made in the divine figure's image.

In addition to suffering this profound personal loss, Henry is, along with his creator, thrown into a chaotic world in an age of considerable scepticism. Berryman has seen, according to Martz, "the wreck of the modern world . . . and the wreck of his personal self in that world" (5), and possesses, "with good reason," a tragic view of human life (9). As Berryman argues in one of his earlier poems, "World-Telegram," the condition of civilization is so deplorable, that to internalize even a single day's news would inevitably

> Curry disorder in the strongest brain,
>
> Immobilize the most resilient will,
>
> Stop trains, break up the city's food supply,
>
> And perfectly demoralize the nation. (DP 21)

While focusing on his personal experiences in The Dream Songs, Henry, as Bo Gustavsson argues, "manages to evoke the temper of his age" (78). He views his dual

trauma, or loss of both father and childhood faith, in connection with "the disastrous history of the 20th century," a history characterized by "war and secularization." Perceiving the negative way in which the "vacuum left by the loss of Christian faith has . . . been filled by totalitarian ideologies and a materialistic way of life," Henry becomes a "representative figure" and expresses "the terror of life in an apocalyptic and sceptical age" (78).

In an attempt to restore order to his fragmented social environment, Henry's selves converge to form a spokesperson derived from several Old Testament figures. He is associated with the prophet Jeremiah, an individual who, according to Arpin, does not bear a "great personal pain," so much as the "general pain" of his people (CC 80).[8] Henry is also aligned with Job, for as Haffenden observes, Berryman envisioned his main character as "a type of Job," who does, in fact, express personal suffering in the Songs (CC 112).[9] Furthermore, Henry is affiliated with the poet of Lamentations, a correlation that I will discuss in detail in subsequent chapters. However, in addition to lamenting, like his predecessors, the decline of religious faith and traditional morality in his society, and balancing questions of God's motives and character with an affirmation of divine providence, Henry succumbs to the very practices he deems immoral and fails to reach any positive definitive conclusions concerning God's role in human lives. He becomes an

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[8]As Haffenden notes in A Critical Commentary, Berryman's "sense of being a prophet unheeded in his own country prompted him in January 1959 to choose for the second epigraph a text from *Lamentations*" (3:63), and to specifically associate this text with Jeremiah 20:7, a verse that uses images of violence and seduction to portray "Yahweh's power over His prophet" (80).

[9]In Song 97, for example, Mr. Bones repeats, in Hebrew, Job's lament of his birth. Berryman referred to him as a "Job's comforter" (CC 112).

abominable prophet, in a sense, seeking to uphold moral and religious compromise rather than envisioning society's former condition as the ideal.

In order to fill the void created by the rejection of Christianity, Henry also attempts, I believe, to become a saviour in a world that generally views the Christ of the New Testament as obsolete. As I will argue in the third chapter of my thesis, Henry recognizes both his divinity and humanity, engages in a poetic "ministry," and is symbolically crucified. Despite his identification with Christ and his adherence to many of the minute details featured in the historical figure's life, however, Henry once again deviates--often radically--from the behaviour of his model. In addition to being an abominable prophet, he is an abominable saviour, rebelling against the divine task assigned to him, merging the sacred with the profane, and delving into excessively sinful behaviour. Because Henry's perception of his father is irrevocably shattered by the suicide, he is, as Christ, unable to submit to a divine patriarchy and cannot reassemble the fragments of a disintegrating religion and world view.

Regardless of the guise he assumes, Henry is unable to penetrate into the mysteries of God, or envision the divine entity as homogeneous. He thus embarks, in The Dream Songs, on a continuous search for a middle ground: a religion in which faith and scepticism can coexist and function "amiabl[y] like lambs" (HF 54); a system of belief in which the paternal and maternal, and the flesh and spirit, are reconciled and even integrated; and an identity in which his fragmented selves form a balanced whole. Although "having [one's] feet planted firmly in mid-air" is a condition equated with delusion and evasion in Recovery, it is perceived as an ideal state by Henry. Nevertheless, his search for balance and stability amidst chaos inevitably fails, leaving him, in the final Song, to wistfully conclude,

> 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. (385)

"KINGED OR THINGED, THOUGH, FLING & WING"

In "The Last Two First Steps" of Recovery, Alan Severance raises the compelling question of "what stability could be *expected* of the cortex" of the brain, considering its "ten billion nerve cells and incredible pathways," and its movement in a cycle of "endless destruction and replacement" (123). Although his observation stems from his contemplation of alcoholism, the image evoked is also applicable to Berryman's belief in the instability and limitless potential of language. Rather than resorting to the use of bland, albeit stable, speech, he creates new "incredible pathways," developing a distinctive style through his manipulation of syntax, his creation of new words and misuse of standard ones, and his juxtaposition "of high style, Berrymanisms, Negro and beat slang" (Lowell "Poetry" 107), "babytalk, minstrelsy . . . awkward grammar, thieves' argot and phrases from foreign languages" (Harris 2). Berryman's regard for syntactical complexity is evident in The Freedom of the Poet, in which he observes, "It is hard to measure what has been lost in our prose by the uniform adoption of a straight-on, mechanical word order (reflecting our *thoughtless* speech)" (14).

Of course, not every critic supports the notion that Berryman's twisted syntax and "untraditional drunken lurching" can be seen as a representation of *thoughtful* speech (Martz 13), or that it is consistent in its quality. As Martz observes, Morgan Blum's description of Berryman's biography as "'Flawed and distinguished,' has the force of an epithet summarizing a central reaction to Berryman" (9). Louise Bogan, for example, "responded to *77 Dream Songs* with the incisive phrase 'this desperate artificiality'" (242), while Lowell comments that the reader frequently "chafes at the relentless indulgence" of the poet's language ("Poetry" 111). While many criticize what they consider to be Berryman's faulty preoccupation with style, however, others, like Alan Tate, perceive his

use of language as "wholly original" and something that "derives from nobody else, and cannot be imitated" (Harris 1).

Disregarding the question of the quality of Berryman's peculiar language, I believe that it is more important to observe that in The Dream Songs, the poet does not merely alter his syntax for the purpose of creating a distinguished voice, but actually often speaks from one world--a chaotic realm governed by "[n]ew rules" (DS 368)--to the world of his readers. Henry's voice literally comes from beyond the grave at times, describing a place where "nouns bec[o]me verbs" (DS 368), where terms such as "Father" carry significance outside of "the one language" (241), where words have the power to inflict bodily injury, and where identity, religion, and language are inextricably linked.[10] What is considered chaotic by this world's standards is deemed natural in this inverted realm: paradox, contradiction, and heterogeneity are associated with normalcy, while logic, consistency, and homogeneity are viewed as suspect.

Having experienced both worlds, Henry is unable to choose between the two and is both drawn and repelled by both sides. In a dialogue with his counterpart, Mr. Bones, the two contemplate the possibility of existing in a state "between" life and death, and instead of choosing sides, remaining "on the fence," "roiling & babbling & braining," and brooding (DS 36). Upon crossing into the realm of death in the fourth section of the Songs, Henry discovers "immense troubles & wonders" and states that he would "howl [his] knowings" if it were not for "the earth/overhead" (83). Nevertheless, he is eventually "dug . . . up" again by those who hear his "[n]oises from underground" (91). Cherishing the "knowings of both worlds" (88), Henry inevitably returns alone to the site, and, as

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[10]As Mancini observes, Berryman "strove in his art to combine aesthetic form, psychological exploration, and spiritual meditation into a therapeutic medium, one that would enable him 'gradually, again and again, to become almost another man'" (BG 1).

"Lazarus with a plan to get his own back," digs madly, seeking, I believe, to unearth not only to the voices of the "violent dead" (88), but his own unearthly voice.

"THE BEGINNING OF THE DARK"

Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection is of particular relevance to the exploration of the disintegration that appears at all levels throughout the work. Henry is inarguably drawn towards the abject, an elusive "something" which, as Kristeva notes in Powers of Horror, draws the subject "toward the place where meaning collapses," and, from its place "of banishment," does not "cease challenging its master" (2). The abject naturally evokes contradictory responses from the subject, for it is both desirable and reprehensible, creating "a vortex of summons and repulsion that places the one haunted by it literally beside himself" (1). Henry, torn between the world and its fringes, is unearthed and appears to be fully human, yet speaks from the beyond; attempts to reestablish religious order as a prophet and a Christ figure, yet strives, with the enthusiasm of a zealot, to destroy boundaries; and longs to possess a homogeneous identity, yet is composed of personalities that do not respect "borders, positions, [or] rules" (PH 4). Growing "weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside," Henry gradually discovers "the impossible within," realizing that he is "none other than abject" (5). Recognizing the futility of attempting to conform with his external world, Henry, in the final Song, stretches towards the elusive "middle ground" (385).

In her 1980 interview with Elaine Hoffman Baruch, Julia Kristeva defines the abject as something that one finds repulsive or repugnant and that evokes an "extremely strong feeling that is at once somatic and symbolic" (118). It is, as she explains in Powers of Horror, what Western culture would consider to be "the improper" and the "unclean." This thing that causes such a violent retching response is simultaneously an "external menace from which one wants to distance oneself" (Baruch 118), and, ironically, something which threatens the individual from within. The abject looms, Kristeva

observes, "quite close" to the subject, luring and challenging the individual despite existing beyond the realm "of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable" (PH 1). In its most primitive and recognizable form, abjection is manifested in food loathing, the nausea that accompanies an encounter with a repulsive food item that one naturally feels compelled to expel, although in the process of gagging or vomiting, one expels part of one's self. In another concrete example, abjection can be seen in an individual's involuntary response to the corpse, a body that has transgressed the limits of the definable, and, crossing the boundary that separates the unquestioned from the unimaginable, brings the inconceivable and vile into the realm of the living. The abject, in other words, defies "identity, system, [and] order," becoming the "in-between, the ambiguous, [and] the composite" (PH 4).

Through Henry, Berryman is able to delve into the mysteries of the abject and probe that which exists beyond the possible. From a distance, he is able to transgress the limits physically and morally imposed upon him. Having lost his own father, for example, Berryman forms a character whose body can be instantaneously transformed into a cadaver that falls "beyond the limit" separating meaning and life from the realm of death in which nothing is signified (PH 3). It is in "the weird regattas of this afterworld" that Henry is reunited with "the blue father" (DS 70). Similarly, Berryman explores his own reluctance to embrace Christianity by transforming Henry into an "Old Pussy-cat" who is unable to consume Christ, the fish (49). Despite fearing the abject without, represented by Christ, Henry is able to recognize the menace that exists within, literally becoming the abject figure that he is unable to ingest. By manipulating Henry's corporeal and psychic boundaries, Berryman probes the abject from perspectives ordinarily impossible.

Nevertheless, in the process of vicariously delving, through Henry, into a world without borders, Berryman becomes intertwined in the abject himself. Because abjection reaches "its apex when death . . . interferes with what, in [one's] living universe, is

supposed to save [one] from death: childhood" (PH 4), he cannot escape that into which he probes, having been prematurely exposed to death through the suicide of his father. Henry becomes an abject figure to Berryman, who, in turn, perceives his creation as a menace, violently denying the suggestion that he is Henry, yet being unable to resist recognizing him as an internal reality. Since the abject is "inescapable" (PH 1), remaining in close proximity to the subject and creating desire, yet refusing to be assimilated, it is of little surprise that Berryman's efforts to stop writing Songs and to retire the character of Henry failed.[11]

In the following three chapters of my thesis, I will explore Kristeva's theory of abjection and its relation to The Dream Songs. I will attempt to ascertain the rationale behind Berryman's fervent creation of a poetry of disintegration, with its controversial disordered language, incongruities of logic, and vivid, graphic displays of the reprehensible. Rather than redundantly pronouncing judgment on the quality and structural coherence of the work, I will explore how the theme of disintegration encapsulates the psychological, religious, and technical aspects of the poetry, and how the abject functions in each of these areas. I will also explore the way in which abjection spills over into "reality," attempting to resolve the tensions surrounding Berryman's (auto)biography and its relation to the text, as well as the problematic relationship between Henry and his provocative creator.

In the first chapter of this paper, "A Wrestle of Undoing," I will focus primarily on the problems of the self and identity in The Dream Songs by exploring the way in which Berryman challenges the Old Testament conception of God and its reduction, through an elaborate system of classification, of the "godly" individual into a singular, definable,

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[11]On the manuscript of Song 25, Berryman commented, "'*no more*; this is the END.'" Berryman's remark, as Haffenden notes, was "dated c. 19 January 1963" (CC 92).

homogeneous entity. Using Kristeva's examination of the biblical tradition of defilement and her theorization of the rigorous social regulations imposed in Leviticus, I will specifically explore Berryman's destruction of the barriers formed by the Law between God, humans, and animals. I will then discuss the poet's violation of physical and psychological boundaries through his graphic images of corporeal disintegration and decay. I will argue, in other words, that Berryman deliberately seeks to illustrate that the abject, or the detestable, cannot be allocated to an external realm, for it exists both within and outside of a subject who cannot thrive as a homogeneous entity. By destroying barriers and rejecting the possibility of a cohesive, singular identity, Berryman challenges the God and the patriarchal religion of the Old Testament.[12]

In "A Half-Closed Book," the second chapter of this paper, I will delve into Kristeva's exploration of the New Testament and its emphasis on the internalization of the abject--the recognition that the menace exists within the speaking subject rather than without. Through Henry, Berryman probes the abject from all angles, observing its function as an external and internal menace, and even transforming the poetic persona into the abject. Henry is threatened from without by his father and God, two entities that are inextricably linked; is challenged from within by the death drive instilled in him through his symbolic introjection of the father; and is consumed by the abject through his transformation into Christ, the ultimate figure of abjection.[13] I will discuss Henry's

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[12]It is important to note, at this point, that Berryman may, in fact, be specifically challenging patriarchal interpretations based on a limited and literal reading of biblical texts. As Karen Armstrong observes, scripture "points beyond itself to a reality which cannot adequately be expressed in words and concepts" (5). Biblical exploration demands a "meditative and intuitive attention" similar to that given to a poem (6).

[13]Although becoming Christ, Henry is ironically unable to consume Christ's flesh through

consequent rebellion against the imposition of the symbolic order upon him, his repulsion at his role as "the Word," his inability to release himself and others from the grip of the abject, and his portrayal of Christ as a sexual figure. The myth of Christ and his relationship to God is, in other words, rewritten, while Christ's supposed ability and desire to save sinners from the abject is subjected to criticism.

Finally, in the concluding chapter, "Where the Soul Not Talks But Sings," I will address the issue of Berryman's problematic syntax, examining the relationship between the disintegration of his language and his exploration of the abject. Moving from the poet's destruction of the homogeneous human identity and traditional modes of religious practice and speech, I will explore what I believe to be his ultimate goal: to reveal the possibilities of language that exists beyond the abject and to create a multifarious speaking subject who is unhindered by rigidly ordered, teleological, patriarchal forms of speech. The "middle ground" Henry longs for is, I believe, one in which neither "the semiotic"--the rhythmic, unconscious, preverbal realm associated with the maternal figure--nor "the symbolic"--the ordered, conscious realm of the paternal figure--dominates.[14] In the realm beyond the abject, the ideal is formed: a language that is both rhythmical and ordered; poetry that is non-linear, yet structured; a God who is multifaceted, yet cohesive; a father that is assertive, yet not tyrannical; and a mother that is powerful, yet nurturing. Although Henry ultimately fails to escape the violence of the maternal and paternal forces that seek to dominate, and does not achieve linguistic or

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the communion ritual. The flesh and the Word are menaces that Henry must internalize, although he simultaneously becomes that which threatens him.

[14]These terms, which I will discuss in greater detail in the final chapter of my paper, are defined in Kristeva's Revolution in Poetic Language.

artistic perfection, he points to the possibilities of language that is neither suppressed nor completely unchecked.

CHAPTER I: "A WRESTLE OF UNDOING"

In the fourth chapter of Powers of Horror, entitled "Semiotics of Biblical Abomination," Julia Kristeva discusses the biblical tradition of defilement and her belief that biblical impurity points to "an autonomous force" that is rooted in maternal power and "*can* be threatening for divine agency" (91). The biblical text, she argues,

> performs the tremendous forcing that consists in subordinating maternal power (whether historical or phantasmatic, natural or reproductive) to symbolic order as pure logical order regulating social performance, [and] as divine Law attended to in the Temple. (91)

As long as the hold of the symbolic order endures, the maternal power is not actualized as a demonic evil, but remains an abstract moral register of the potential of sin and guilt. Impurity becomes equated with "cult," or that which does not adhere to symbolic order and the Law upon which the symbolic community is founded. The loathsome, in other words, is that which "disobeys classification rules peculiar to the given symbolic system" (92).

In an attempt to elucidate the social and subjective needs that the biblical system of classification specifically attempts to fulfill and what "types" of subjectivity and society are represented by this system, Kristeva explores the "pure/impure" distinction established in the Old Testament example of Noah, whose ability to differentiate pure beasts from the impure enables him to win the favour of God (92). The "tahor/tame"[15] relation, she argues, appears to create order and is dependent upon a covenant with God.

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[15]According to the New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, the Hebraic term "tahor" refers to that which is "clean," while the adjective "tame" is used to refer to that which is ceremonially "unclean" (Van Gemeren 965).

In other words, the opposition is "inscribed in the biblical text's basic concern with separating, [and] with constituting strict identities without intermixture" (93), and is crucial, to cite one primary objective, in establishing a distance between man and God. Separated into three major categories of abomination, tahor/tame entails dietary taboos, "corporeal alteration and its climax, death," and the female body and incest (93). The impure includes, as one can logically deduce from these categories, not only physical matter, but immoral behaviour, including involvement in idolatry and sexual immorality.

The first category of abomination, involving food taboos, serves the purpose of maintaining the distance between humans and God "by means of a dietary differentiation" (95). The first breach of this differentiation occurs in the Garden of Eden when man disregards God's admonition to avoid eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge and willfully chooses to become like God, distinguishing good from evil. In response, God attempts to prevent man from further identifying himself with his creator--through the acquisition of immortality from the tree of life--by banishing him from the Garden. In order to uphold the now shaky separation between the creator and his creation, God allocates vegetables to man's use, while claiming living beings as his own through means of sacrifice. It is only after the Flood that man is permitted to incorporate animal flesh into his diet, an authorization that is, as Kristeva points out, by no means intended as an honour or privilege, but is indicative of an acknowledgment on God's part of human depravity, and the innate and inextinguishable inclination to commit murder. God's permission signifies a negative recognition of the "ineradicable 'death drive,'" seen in its "most primordial or archaic aspect" as devouring (96). Despite this grim judgment on man's character, however, a critical distinction between man and God is still upheld: blood is destined for God through sacrifice, while bloodless flesh is deemed acceptable for human consumption.

Kristeva continues by examining the rigorous restrictions imposed by the Yahwist in Leviticus. Through the incident in which two officiants are consumed by fire during an

offering to Yahweh, it becomes clear that sacrifices must be "inscribed in a logic of the pure/impure distinction" before being presentable (97). The sacrifice, in other words, must exhibit a logic of "separation, distinction, and difference" in order to be considered valid (97). Furthermore, it must not only be restricted to a place, such as the Temple, to be considered pure, but must accord with the speech, or logic of the divine word. Ruminants that possess hooves that part, for example, are deemed acceptable, whereas animals that do not chew the cud and whose hooves do not part, are regarded as impure. Furthermore, carnivores, and animals that do not remain in a single element, whether sea, heaven, or earth, are deemed unfit for human consumption. What results is an elaborate system of classification that prevents humans from tainting themselves with that which causes intermixture and disorder.

The second major category of abomination addresses the maintenance of an individual's physical integrity. One of the most obvious and critical boundaries of "biological and psychic individuation" is the skin (101), a surface that is threatened by abominable diseases such as leprosy, which, consequently, also pose a threat to the individual's identity. Any marks, gashes, blemishes, or physical defects are categorized as abominable in Leviticus, for they align the individual with "the impure, the non-separate, the non-symbolic, [and] the non-holy" (102). Secretions and discharges which leak or flow are considered detestable as well, for boundaries are being broken and intermixture is occurring. Similarly, fecal matter is linked to decay and must be continuously expelled in order for the individual to remain autonomous. Finally, and most significantly, the corpse represents "fundamental pollution," for it differs from the spiritual, and, in a state of decay, is the epitome of "waste, transitional matter, [and] mixture" (109). As Kristeva observes in the first chapter of Powers of Horror, the corpse, "the most sickening of wastes," is "a border that has encroached upon everything" (3).

Considering the complexity of the regulations methodically established in Leviticus for the purpose of ensuring that the boundaries between man and God, and

between the chosen people and "pagan" nations, are not compromised, it is rather remarkable to observe Berryman's equally thorough and concise violation of each of the major barriers set up in the law. Although it is spurious to make the assumption that Berryman is, in fact, deliberately and strategically confronting these specific Levitical laws *per se*, one cannot deny his concern with the way in which God is portrayed in the Old Testament or ignore his scepticism concerning the restrictive barriers that an individual must accept to maintain his identity as one of God's chosen people. In a note written on November 20, 1971, Berryman discusses the relevant issue of slavery.[16] "There is no such thing as Freedom," he declares, for there is only slavery, or "walls around one," and the "absence-of-slavery," or the "ability to walk in any direction, or remain still" (RE 232). Although recognizing that humans have endured a slavish existence ever since the Fall in the Garden of Eden, Berryman emphasizes that escape from this enclosure is both desirable and possible. It is a difficult endeavor, of course, for not only are the walls strong and the prisoner weak, but the captive actually loves his enclosure, being "programmed-for-walls." As Berryman explains, the "Outside may be Hell worse than the hell in here, and I am too afraid of it even to begin action toward it." To escape, the individual must refuse "to accept Walls as God's will," and implore God to "*take the walls away*" (232).

The Dream Songs records, I believe, Berryman's struggle to escape from both religious slavery and the false security that results from internalizing the faulty notion that God expects his followers to exist in an enclosure. Berryman was, notably, simultaneously attracted to and repelled by Judaism, especially in the later years of his life. He exhibited, as John Haffenden observes in The Life of John Berryman, an affinity

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[16]This fragment is one of several notes left behind following Berryman's death in January, 1972, and was published along with the incomplete text of Recovery.

with Jewish writings and thought, made an effort to learn Hebrew, desired to compile an anthology of Yiddish poetry, and began a translation of Job. During his religious crisis in 1971, Berryman noted that upon leaving Mass one morning, he "came to [his] room and incredibly thought of *becoming a Jew*" (RE 72), although he had always considered it "impossible because of [his] inadequate concept of God" (383).[17] Despite his fascination with Judaism, however, he failed to convert, choosing to embrace Catholicism in the final year of his life.

It is reasonable to assume that Berryman feared being enclosed within restrictive boundaries, being defined by his religious affiliation, and being forced to adopt a limited, concrete conception of God. The poet rebelled, after all, against other boundaries imposed upon him, objecting to being equated with Henry, responding with violent indignation when dubbed a "confessional poet," and reacting with distress when labeled a Jew. It is, therefore, only logical that Berryman would challenge the guidelines established in the Old Testament, especially considering its phenomenal historical, social, and cultural impact. The poet responds to the text through Rabbi Henry, who is so preoccupied with studying the Torah and "writing commentaries/more likely to be burnt than printed," that his wife must support the couple financially (DS 136). Recognizing the biblical text's need for "revision," Rabbi Henry "worrie[s] the Sacred Book," frequently teaching "its fringes" (136). Although he longs to engage in another occupation, Henry is consumed with the suicide of his father upon which it "all centre[s]" (136), and in comprehending the nature of a God who would take his father from him.

Through this often heretical character, Berryman is able to rebel against the Old Testament's dietary, corporeal, and sexual restrictions, and to explore, in a sense, the demoniacal, a term which Kristeva tentatively describes as "an inescapable, repulsive,

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[17]Berryman's conversion is, in this example, related through the character of Severance.

and yet nurtured abomination" (PH 107). In her struggle to define and capture the essence of the demoniacal, Kristeva envisions a force that tempts us "to the point of losing our differences, our speech, our life; to the point of aphasia, decay, opprobrium, and death." The Dream Songs is, significantly, marked by a loss of difference, the destruction of speech, and the infiltration of death and disintegration. The poet engages, I believe, in a struggle to tear down the barriers that separate him from God. Berryman's project is terrifying, for his search has the potential to uncover a maligned entity, ironically indistinguishable from the abominable. God, in other words, may, in fact, be "inescapable" and "repulsive"--a character who, under the guise of promoting life, seeks to eradicate it, and a monster who constructs boundaries for the sole purpose of deceiving his worshippers in terms of his true identity.[18] It is even possible that in challenging Old Testament boundaries, Berryman will uncover a being as fragmented and multi-faceted as himself--a brutish, disintegrating entity.

"WE ALL BRUTES AND FOOLS"

Whereas the biblical text seeks to maintain the man/God difference by preventing humans from engaging in specific behaviours such as consuming carnivorous animals, Berryman strives to upset and violate boundaries by challenging the validity of both the animal/man and man/God distinctions. The process of creating and destroying these borders is set in perpetual motion in The Dream Songs: animals acquire human

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[18]The God of the Old Testament can be seen, according to Armstrong, as a contradictory figure who is "omnipotent but powerless to control humanity; ominiscient but ignorant of human yearning; creative but a destroyer; benevolent but a killer; wise but arbitrary; just but partial and unfair" (117). Like the abject, the sacred reality remains "an ineffable mystery which fills us with dread but exerts a ceaseless attraction."

intelligence, social order and creativity, yet are associated with chaos; humans become primitive, fierce beasts, yet are endowed with remarkable divine attributes; and God himself appears in both a human form and in the body of a savage carnivore. No creature in The Dream Songs thrives as a homogeneous, predictable entity, or lacks complexity. I will begin my discussion of Berryman's colourful assortment of beasts by specifically examining the ways in which the human and animal worlds intermingle and overlap. I will then discuss the imposition of the animal realm onto the spiritual realm and the resulting implications of this identification of God with the impure.

It is important to note that, at times, Berryman's transformation of a human into an animal is, biblically speaking, relatively inoffensive and even rooted in Scripture. One could argue that although the poet seems intent on violating taboos and openly flaunting the abominable, he is also capable of abiding, in terms of images and modes of thought, by tradition in The Dream Songs, however conservative.[19] In "Snow Line," for example, the speaker assumes the position of a lost sheep, evoking images of the New Testament parable as well as the Psalmist's conception of God as a divine shepherd:

> It was wet & white & swift and where I am
> we don't know. It was dark and then
> it isn't.
> I wish the barker would come. There seems to be to eat
> nothing. I am unusually tired.

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[19]In The Given and the Made, Helen Vendler observes a similar paradoxical use of both tradition and the upheaval of former modes of thought in Berryman's "love" poetry. Although Berryman engages in a "joyous blasphemy of traditional love-poetry" (37), she writes, he uses "metaphors straight out of the love-tradition," creating an "exhilerating" balance between "the parodic and the ecstatic" (38).

I'm alone too.

If only the strange one with so few legs would come,
I'd say my prayers out of my mouth, as usual.
Where are his notes I loved?
There may be horribles; it's hard to tell.
The barker nips me but somehow I feel
he too is on my side.

I'm too alone. I see no end. If we could all
run, even that would be better. I am hungry.
The sun is not hot.
It's not a good position I am in.
If I had to do the whole thing over again
I wouldn't. (28)

Berryman's sheep, in this example, is not only a "pure" animal by biblical standards, but is clearly differentiated from his superior, the "strange one with so few legs." Intellectually, he poses no threat to his Master, for he cannot even grasp the concept of day and night except to observe that it "was dark" and now "it isn't." Although he shows some aesthetic awareness, being drawn to the shepherd's "notes," his language is simplistic, for he is little more than an instinctive organism whose primary concerns consist of eating, avoiding predators, and remaining within the safety of the flock.

In contrast, the shepherd is musically creative and formidable enough to extract prayers from the mouth of his charge. Because the poem places the human into the position of an animal, and God into the form of a human, God, albeit the God described by the sheep, becomes more accessible. The reader, in other words, is briefly given a perspective equal to that of God's, or greater (if the sheep's testimony that the shepherd is

unaware of the animal's location is, in fact, true), and is led to observe that we as humans, who exist spiritually in a bewildering position similar to that of the sheep's, understand little in comparison to God. We are only capable of forming limited observations pertaining to our environment and inevitably fail to grasp the greater meaning behind our condition.

In addition to creating an obvious gap between the sheep and the shepherd, Berryman distinguishes both individuals from the "horribles" (28), predatory members of what one can conclude to be a threatening autonomous force. Like the abject, the threat neither physically manifests itself, nor allows itself to be defined, but merely instigates a fear response in the sheep and makes the animal, despite its limited reason, aware that it has moved from the authority of its master into a precarious position between God and the undefinable evil, or that which is, to use Kristeva's terms, incompatible with divine law. The poem can be deemed religiously obedient, for although it concludes with a description of the sheep's despair rather than his redemption and leaves open to speculation the possibility that the divine shepherd is not a God of rescue, the animal's movement away from the flock and his master, whose "notes [he] loved," is portrayed as a tragic decision.

Although man is portrayed as a relatively benign animal in "Snowline," he more frequently assumes the guise of a predator in The Dream Songs, a carnivore with whom the less aggressive animals are at odds. This conflict is particularly evident within Henry, for one animal part of his identity tends to subsume or dominate another opposing animal aspect of his being. The sheep, or spiritually introspective part of Henry that is lost in the "wet & white & swift" storm in "Snowline," for example, is eventually symbolically consumed by Henry the carnivore, who "wolf[s] his meals, lamb-warm" after "sleep[ing] up a short storm" (96). After being terrified by "the dancing mouse" and darkness in Song 12, Henry acquires the ferocity of an owl preying on a field-mouse in Song 374. Despite periodically assuming the form of a dog, as I will discuss later, Henry is forced to defend

himself against these animals as a raccoon. In Song 57, he recalls "a 'coon treed,/flashlights, & barks," and admits that he "was in that tree," while in Song 66, he describes how a "journalism doggy took a leak/against absconding coon."[20] Although he is often at the mercy of the dogs, however, they too are rendered ridiculous or become amiable. A "journalism doggy" who urinates on another animal is by no means a respectable predator, while the "[b]are dogs" in Song 75 rejoice and perform "friendly operations" around Henry's tree. The influence held by one animal over another tends to fluctuate depending upon which of Henry's moods predominates.

It is significant that Berryman most commonly associates the characters in the Songs with offensive creatures, the majority of which are deemed detestable in Leviticus. These "humans," in other words, do not merely stray towards the abject, as in the case of the sheep, but become directly aligned with it. Incidentally, many of these creatures are nocturnal carnivores whose associations with the night and darkness place them in direct

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[20]The term "coon" may also derogatorily refer to Henry's persona as a black man. Henry's attitude towards difference is notably paradoxical: although viewing the destruction of groups of people based on their ethnicity as vile, Henry affirms stereotypes; while attempting to destroy the boundaries and barriers that separate various groups, he continues to build them through his generalizations. For example, although he appears in blackface, adopts the appropriate language, and describes the "'coons" as his "brothers" (107), Henry trivializes their attempts to achieve unity elsewhere, stating, "Negroes ignite!" (232), rather than unite. Whereas Henry recognizes that he must go "abroad" to discover locations "where holiness held forth" (210), he reduces the adherents of the very faiths and cultures that mystify him to stereotypes, stating, for example, that there were enough "deep-freeze, & snacks" to "keep a Hindu family-group alive" (216), and praising "Japanese women" for their sexual styles (351).

opposition to that which is considered upright. Normal human behaviour consists, of course, of activity during the day, while God himself is consistently aligned with light, appearing as a burning bush and a pillar of fire in the Torah. It is not coincidental, I believe, that Henry appears as an opossum, a raccoon, an owl, a snake, a rat, and a bat, or that Berryman goes to the trouble of emphasizing Henry's affinity with the darkness and his existence on the fringes of society. In Song 374, to cite one example, Henry is envisioned as one who is as "fierce in blackness as an owl/on a field-mouse at the edge of my camp" (374). Although he is not always a nocturnal animal, darkness is an integral part of Henry's identity.

Even if Berryman is not, in fact, directly challenging Levitical law in his selection of animals, it is obvious that he chooses specimens that are generally considered vile in form or habit, and connects them with human behaviour. In Song 13, for example, Henry is said to live "like a rat" (13), a statement that is not particularly unusual or suggestive until one has examined its larger context. The line is embedded among various religious phrases, including the observation that Henry lived like a rat "in the beginning" (13).[21] Because Berryman uses the word "in" instead of "from," images of the first creation account in Genesis are evoked, and the possibility that Henry has always possessed rat-like tendencies, even "in the beginning" when the creation was still apparently flawless, is raised. The animal is, Berryman suggests, an integral part of a human. The speculation about whether Henry "was a human being" that follows appears to redefine what constitutes "a human American man" (13). Henry exhibits behaviour so obviously animal that it brings his humanity into question, but is eventually, after close investigation,

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[21]I am assuming, of course, that the phrase "in the beginning" relates not only to Henry's "thatch of hair" as a baby, but to his rodent-like behaviour. The sentence is, in Berryman's usual style, ambiguous.

categorized as a valid human. These two facets of his being coexist to form a "typical" human, a human that is, nevertheless, somewhat detestable, for God is declared to be "Henry's enemy" (13).[22]

Henry also appears to have an affinity with bats in the first two stanzas of the rather playful Song 63. As in Song 13, his humanity is questionable, for he is said to lament "joining the human race," as if he, unlike any other individual, has been given a choice in the matter, or was capable of reasoning before assuming a human form. His natural affiliation in this Song is with bats and the darkness they inhabit. Ironically, blindness and chaos are associated with human civilization and its "[f]ilthy four-foot lights" (63), whereas the black cave, inhabited by Henry's "cousins" who "hang in hundreds or swerve/with personal radar," is associated with order, flawless vision, and a "crisisless" existence. Although the bat is deemed impure in both Leviticus and Deuteronomy, Berryman emphasizes the numerous ways in which it is superior to humans and upholds the value of reason that exists "out of the cave" of limited human perception and the confines of a structured and compartmentalized society. It is humans, in this Song, that become strange, if not detestable in terms of habit and behaviour.

The association of Henry with a serpent is significant as well, especially when viewed in relation to Kristeva and the logic of separation. In her discussion of the man/God distinction, Kristeva refers to the implication of both woman and the serpent in the first sin against God--the vain attempt to acquire the creator's knowledge. One should note, she warns, that "there is a feminine and animal temptation that is concealed" in an entire category of abomination--that of dietary taboos (PH 96). As in his portrayal of the virtues of the bat, however, Berryman defies the reader's expectations concerning this

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[22]I will address the issue of the relationship between God and Henry in the following chapter.

traditionally detestable animal. Ignoring the common association of the serpent with the vice of pride and the fact that the Law commands God's people to avoid defiling themselves with any "living thing that creepeth on the ground" (Lev. 20:25), Berryman likens Henry to a snake when the character is, ironically, in his most humble state. He is said, in Song 287, to react "like a snake to praise," shedding his skin in order to appear "in a new guise" that will render him unrecognizable. Longing to be saved from "greed," "vanity," and "the mirror's eyes," Henry even prays to be left alone. He envisions, in this Song, an ideal middle zone, one in which he is given the choice of being "both unknown & known" (287). Despite Henry's alignment with an unpopular creature, the reader cannot help but sympathize with his "abominable" desire to embrace two identities and exist in a state that is not marked by definable boundaries.

One of Henry's most fascinating forms is that of a "monstrous bug" in Song 310. Because Berryman states that language is "best handled by a foreigner" and describes "Kafka" as his "old pal" before evoking images of the large insect, it is obvious that Henry's transformation coincides with the experience of Gregor Samsa in Kafka's novella, The Metamorphosis, who awakes one morning from "uneasy dreams" to find himself transformed "into a monstrous vermin" (3).[23] Samsa, with his abominable physical characteristics, becomes a living representation of the abject, secreting "brown liquid" from his mouth, devouring rotting food while detesting the fresh produce offered to him, and excreting waste products so offensive that his sister, in charge of his maintenance, must race to open a window upon entering the room in order to avoid

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[23]The insect theme appears elsewhere in The Dream Songs. In Song 31, for example, Henry and Phoebe are as "happy as cockroaches," while Henry, in the next stanza, does "a praying mantis pray." In Song 95, Henry is described as "insect-like" in his sleep, although it is technically possible that the insect is the "surly cop" whom he encounters.

suffocation. Notably, many of the challenges encountered by Kafka's protagonist are also endured by Berryman's subject. Each character, for example, suffers specifically from a lack of affirmation by his father and is placed prematurely in the father's position: Samsa assumes the role as the family's provider, while Henry becomes a father despite never having been adequately fathered himself. Each contends with issues of abandonment, can be said to endure a living death, and experiences a gradual physical and mental deterioration. Even more fascinating is the possibility that a similar religious significance is subtly intertwined in the plights of Samsa and Henry. As Stanley Corngold observes, it has been argued that Samsa's transformation can be considered, quite literally, a negative or inverse transfiguration (63). Samsa, in other words, may be an abortive Christ figure, as I believe Henry to be.[24]

It is of little surprise that both Samsa and Henry are torn between abiding by the rules and obligations that define appropriate, civilized human behaviour, and digressing into a purely animal state, fulfilling the most basic primal, instinctive appetites, however distasteful. Their sense of social belonging is also a crucial issue. At one moment, Samsa marvels in the feeling of being "integrated into human society once again" (Kafka 13), while at another, he recognizes that he possesses a "pathetic and repulsive shape" and that his family is obliged to "swallow their disgust and endure him" (40). Henry similarly enjoys moments of intense pleasure in the members of his family, as is evident in Song 330: "The Twiss is a tidy bundle, chirped joyous Henry,/all other dreams forgotten." However, he must, of course, return to the vivid nightmare that slowly consumes him. Like the great dung beetle, Henry feels trapped, "danc[ing] about his cage" on "all fours" in Song 351, and is not always recognizable, becoming, in Song 9, "horrible Henry," and

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[24]I will specifically address the relationship between Christ and Henry in the following chapter.

placing his "girl" in the uncomfortable position of determining "if he's still human," a situation similar to that faced by Samsa's sister.

Following his transformation into an insect, Gregor Samsa's ability to communicate quickly disintegrates. His "own voice" is altered by an intruding "chirping" which leaves "the clarity of his words intact only for a moment" before "badly garbling them" (Kafka 5). He is said to possess "the voice of an animal," and recognizes that although his words seem "clear enough to him," they cannot be understood by humans (13). Similarly, Henry babbles, growls, chirps, barks, and howls throughout The Dream Songs, resorting to the use of a language that is baffling to outsiders. Berryman's reader is placed in a situation similar to that experienced by Gregor Samsa's family, who listen to the man behind the locked wooden door, struggling to make sense of his utterances.

It is important to observe that Gregor Samsa's transformation may not entirely entail degradation. He frequently behaves, of course, as a lower life form, living up to the author's initial description of him as a "ungeheueres Ungeziefer," or a "monstrous vermin" (Kafka 3). It is crucial to note, at this point, that according to the original sense of the words, the term "Ungeheuer" is suggestive of a creature "who has no place in the family," while the word "Ungehziefer" refers to an "unclean animal unsuited for sacrifice, [or] the creature without a place in God's order" (Corngold xix). Upon awakening, Samsa becomes the abject, extricated from that which is favourable to God. Nevertheless, as Corngold argues in his introduction to the novella, Samsa is not simply a sedentary insect who hides in musty darkness, but is capable of being "an airy, flighty kind of creature" (xix), restrained only by the walls that conceal him. Furthermore, with the exception of one moment of longing to return to an ordinary existence, Samsa surprisingly does not express the desire to return to his original form. As a dung beetle he is, for the first time, receptive to music, believing, albeit erroneously, that it will "open a way for him toward the unknown nourishment he longs for" (Corngold xx). His developing aesthetic awareness illustrates, to some degree, Kafka's belief that "to be a writer is to be

condemned to irreparable estrangement" (xx). As a writer, Corngold argues, it is possible to experience the "delight of reflection and the beautiful lament," but one must also exist as "a kind of dead creature, from whom the living must flee" (xix).

Henry is, in his various animal forms, clearly a creature of paradox; a detestable beast who is nevertheless capable of beautiful laments. One of his rather vulgar transformations involves assuming the character of a dog. He is said to "worr[y] the Sacred Book" like "a dog with a bone" (DS 136), is "as solitary as his dog" (260), acts "like a dog after its tail" in hospital (54), growls at the head nurse (54), and "woof[s] at things" (74). He is also linked to this animal through subtle parallels, including the fact that his dog is mentioned, then specifically described as "half-beagle" (53), in the way in which Henry is referred to, then described immediately as "human (half)" (191). Like Kafka, Berryman often deliberately foregrounds his character's unpleasant animal-like tendencies, describing, for example, Henry's vulgar response to "Rich Critical Prose" by stating that "he growled, broke wind, and scratched himself & left/that fragrant area" (170). Basic primal instincts and bodily functions, realities which civilized humans commonly seek to conceal, are blatantly exposed in The Dream Songs.

Furthermore, human sexual relations, rigorously controlled in Levitical law, are reduced by Berryman to a level of animal activity. Henry not only commits adultery, but also playfully treads on the boundaries of the admonition not to engage in a sexual relationship with an animal. I am not suggesting, of course, that he literally commits the act of bestiality, but that he engages in bestial behaviour, boldly indulging in acts of blatant impurity. Copulation becomes tainted by its association with animals in the same way that ingestion becomes an instinctive animal function. In the way in which Henry acts "beastly" when eating, "wolf[ing] friend breakfast" and "pigg[ing] dinner" (235), he is frequently "beastly with love" (11). In Song 351, "Animal Henry" wrestles with his lust, dancing "about his cage," while comparing Japanese women, with their "rhythmical" and "piercing" style of lovemaking, to Swedish women. He playfully toys with double

entendres, describing "Love in the shadows where the animals *come*," and fixates on the fact that "Somewhere, everywhere/a girl is taking her clothes off." Furthermore, he toys with other areas, massaging himself "at all hours," tickling "his nerves' ends," and "polishing the surfaces"--engaging, in other words, in the "[b]rain-& instinct-work" involved in the act of self-stimulation. In another poem concerning sexual behaviour, "A Stimulant for an Old Beast," Berryman describes a woman in sensual, yet animal terms, observing that she "holds her breath like a seal," and yet is "whiter & smoother" (3). Similarly, Berryman describes, in Song 142, the "animal moment, when he sorted out her tail/in a rump session with the vivid hostess." Of course, intercourse does not technically occur in this example, for Henry fears straying from divine law and his marriage bed, questioning how he would "have atoned" or "ever forgiven himself" had he given in to his instincts. Nevertheless, the image of two animals instinctively mating and the suggestion that we are, in fact, merely animals, remains. As Mr. Bones observes, adhering to the marriage covenant is "good," but "it ain't natural" (142).

At the same time, it is, paradoxically, the animal within Henry that is capable of profound artistic and intellectual expression.[25] In the poems concerning Henry's solitude as a poet and the elevation of his thought, he frequently assumes the form of a cat. Cat imagery is, I believe, used in the depiction of moments of inspiration or intense emotion

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[25]In Henry's Fate, Berryman describes Henry's reluctance to fully integrate the canine and feline aspects of his paradoxical identity, even after The Dream Songs. Henry admits that

> Being a dog & being treated like one
> except by Congress & the President's wife
> Being also a cat & being treated like one
> petted, purred at & feared
>
> I can't say who I am. (HF 52)

in The Dreams Songs and tends to be linked to storms, whether symbolic or literal, as well as the sea. In Song 339, for example, the speaker, whose heart is "in a whirl," describes the calm after a gale, noting the "delicious breeze" and the "Cats-paws of wind" that ruffle "the black water." The cat-like wind, in this poem, appears to be toying with the dark water, a symbol generally associated with the unknown or the subconscious. Similarly, after describing a storm consisting of lightning and thunder in Song 233, the speaker remarks that "cats hate water/and love fish," an observation with religious significance.[26] Song 25, in turn, includes Mr. Bones's vivid description of a dream of a lyre and a Cat "which fought and sang" on an island, a description that evokes images of the storm in Shakespeare's The Tempest. Once again, water is a crucial topic, for the lyre is unstrung and "[l]inked to the land at low tide" (25). Throughout these poems, the cat's inspiration appears to be directly correlated with the depth of the water into which he must delve. Nevertheless, the sea, like the abject, is that which will "toss/& endlessly . . . undo" (303).

Henry himself appears as Senator Cat, Henry Cat, and Pussy-cat, the latter being a name given to Berryman by Randall Jarrell. Whereas Gregor Samsa's interest in music grows following his metamorphosis into a beetle, Henry is unusually sensitive--emotionally, aesthetically, and spiritually--when in the form of a cat. Even in Song 272, in which he is only partially cat-like, being likened to an "egg lined with fur," he is said to sprout what can be considered to be spiritual or poetic appendages through the "little cats" who "hurt [his] shoulders," growing "there like wings" (272). Although he initially appears, in the form of a feline, to be merely a positive and amiable creature, his depth and potential to engage in introspection are evident. The reader is first introduced to a

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[26]As Arpin argues, the fish may represent Christ, and the water both the water of spiritual initiation through baptism and the larger, more foreboding sea.

"[g]entle, friendly Henry Pussy-cat" in Song 19, who smiles "at himself alone" in the mirror of a murderer (19). Although the mirror was, in fact, an object possessed by Berryman and owned formerly by a convicted killer (CC 88), the image of the cat beaming into it is disconcerting. There is, within these lines, the subtle suggestion that there is a darkness inherent in Henry's image that can be potentially detected, although the gazing cat appears unsuspecting. After all, the ambiguity of the stanza does not exclude the possibility that the mirror is still owned by a murderer of sorts. In the subsequent poems featuring Henry Pussy-cat, he is, inarguably, a powerful, eloquent, and lively creature. He introduces himself in Song 22 with the exuberant declaration, "I am Henry Pussy-cat! My whiskers fly!", and may even be "the abominable & semi-mortal Cat" referred to in Song 80.[27] He is a cat who "must . . . be heard" at "Harvard & Yale" (108), is "the master" of "grace & fear" (296), and is associated with the poetic dreamlike realm of "whiskers & fogs" (122).

Although it is Henry's transformations that are most frequently alluded to in The Dream Songs, Berryman raises the possibility that his character's half-human, half-animal condition is both universal and prevalent, at least as far as Henry's perspective is concerned. As Henry remarks to Mr. Bones, "we all brutes & fools" (62). It is possible that Henry is projecting his internal chaos and the conflicting animal personalities contained within his identity onto his external environment, thereby eradicating the barriers that separate himself as a cohesive, albeit multi-faceted, entity from his surrounding environment. Song 179, for example, features a crowd of brutish individuals who, from Henry's point of view, begin "goring each other" at a poetry reading, leaving their seats to form a "stampede" of unruly cattle. Henry similarly recognizes the bestial

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[27]As I will examine later, the Cat described in Song 80 cannot be conclusively identified because of the ambiguity of the final line.

element in others in his recollection of a discussion he once had concerning "the altering bodies of the labile souls" with other poets in their "younger years" (282). He describes both the circle of poets and the labile souls as bestial contenders, or "foes fang on fang" (282). In Song 236, the question of "who's good, who's evil, whose tail or whose wings" crosses Henry's mind, while in Song 191, he exhibits an inability, or reluctance, to differentiate the death of animals from the death of humans. After describing the fatalities of a small bird and six flies in his "house of death," the speaker grieves the loss of one of Henry's oldest friends, ironically stating that "[a]ll these deaths," rather than the single human fatality, "keep Henry pale & ill" (191). The reader cannot help but take his statement in an earlier poem that "we are brothers" quite literally (107), even though he is referring to a rabbit and small group of raccoons, for Henry addresses the loss of humans and animals with a similar despair, recognizing himself in both.

Perhaps the most striking moment in which the boundaries between man and animal, fantasy and reality, and the internal and external worlds of Henry are crossed, occurs in the lively and chaotic scenario described in Song 368. Through Henry's gates, "buoyant & credible & wild" monsters gallop, assuming control of the great city and forcing its human inhabitants to flee. Chaos ensues: animals are "untied" during this bizarre episode and the thought, or logic of Henry's human "kind," lurches "to a halt." Even normal language is transformed, for "all nouns became verbs" following the monsters' infiltration into society. Although Henry's "people" respond with anguish to these abominable creatures, the monsters have an uncanny resemblance to upper class humans. They are, for example, "high-bred," despite being mere beasts, and ruthlessly cast aside members of their own species who possess recognizable physical differences, forcing them to "lurk[ ] to the suburbs." The speaker even unwittingly describes one beast as "a young girl/with several legs," rather than as a monster.

Although the scene is one of chaos, the reader is left, I believe, to question whether Henry's vision is "a really bad dream," as he claims, or whether it is an accurate

commentary on reality and the human character. Furthermore, one cannot help but entertain the possibility that the disorder caused by the imposition of monsters improves the city's condition and the quality of its population; through the recognition of the bestial within and the destruction of barriers, beauty and energy are permitted to flourish. It is possible, for example, that the airport has been closed not because of the replacement of civilization and its advancements with the primitive, but because the buoyancy of the monsters has rendered such technological innovations obsolete. Even the language of the "credible" monsters is characterized by its remarkable accuracy, fluidity, and energy. A mere passing stranger is, despite her inexperience as a youth, able to force Henry to his knees with her brief, yet unusually insightful poetic declaration that "You is a swirl/of ending dust, Your Majesty." Stripped of his feelings of superiority over the monsters who surround him, Henry's "bad dream" entails a recognition of the simplicity and fragility that characterizes and unites all life forms, whether bestial or civilized.

"WHAT A CARELESS MONSTER HE MUST BE"

It is evident, upon close examination of the variety of animals whose characters infiltrate and enliven The Dream Songs, that that which may be deemed abominable is also beautiful and that which is civilized is simultaneously detestable. Furthermore, a "single" individual like Henry is really multi-faceted, composed of numerous conflicting voices and personalities. To attempt to completely differentiate humans from animals or reduce an individual into a single homogeneous identity, is a misguided endeavor, for boundaries are unnatural and do little more than suppress or attempt to conceal various aspects that are integral to one's being. Henry, despite being labeled a "human American man" (13), defies being reduced to any simplistic persona.

Considering the frequency with which humans become animals and animals become human, it is of little surprise that the boundaries between mortals and God are also challenged. Once again, Berryman confronts the restrictions established in the Law,

openly negating its strategy of separation in order to confute accepted, yet narrow conceptions of God based on the Old Testament. Levitical law, Kristeva observes, imposes monotheism through "semes that clothe the process of separation," in an attempt to guarantee "the place and law of the One God" (PH 94). To put it more succinctly, the "place *and* law of the One do not exist without a *series of separations* that are oral, corporeal, or even more generally material" (PH 94). By eradicating the distinctions that formerly separated animals, humans, and God, Berryman raises numerous daunting possibilities pertaining to what God really is. It is a very telling statement that Rabbi Henry's commentaries are "more likely to be burnt than printed" (DS 136).

Before discussing Berryman's portrayal of God as both an animal and a multi-faceted human much like Henry, I believe that it is necessary to briefly examine the relationship between another Old Testament text, Lamentations, and the Songs. Because the epigraph to The Dream Songs contains the inconspicuous, albeit crucial quotation, "Thou drewest near in the day," the reader is forced to take into account the loss suffered by the Israelites during the Babylonian Exile of 586 BCE.[28] As Gustavsson reveals, Lamentations testifies to an "unparalleled disaster" in Israel's history--the siege of Jerusalem and the subsequent Babylonian captivity (77). This catastrophic event, he observes, "marked the end of the age of optimistic Hebraism" and created a new scepticism concerning Yahweh's direct control over human history (77). The poet in Lamentations records the devastating impact the destruction of Jerusalem had on the Jewish faith and like Berryman centuries later, "courageously tries to grasp the meaning of the events by reformulating the beliefs of Yahwism" (77).

Berryman deliberately situates his poetry in a historical context in order to establish a foundational preconception of God that acts as a guideline for the reader to

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[28]Although unidentified, this quotation is taken from Lamentations 3:57.

follow. The reference to Lamentations and the use of many of its themes and images suggest that instead of being a just, loving Father, God's real character is evident in a past record marred by inconsistency and infidelity. This hidden God is "Henry's enemy" (13), and a maligned being to whom humans "must submit" (153). He is a "dark God" (266), who, in the "worst career" imaginable (335), has "wrecked this generation" (153), "gorged" and "seized" numerous victims (153), and inflicted many "surprises" (168). The question, "God loves his creatures when he treats them so?" (266), remains unanswered.

Numerous parallels exist between Henry and the speaker in Lamentations. As Gustavvson argues, each is a representative figure who, through the expression of his own personal experience, reflects the temper of his "apocalyptic and sceptical age" (77). Each stars in a poem primarily centered on the theme of suffering and attempts to survive despite experiencing an "irreversible loss" consisting of the desertion of his primary source of protection (DS i.). In the way in which the covenant between God and his people is permanently broken following the destruction of Jerusalem, Henry's joyful childhood union with both his father and God is permanently altered following the suicide of his father. He is left to clamor for a return to his previous edenic state in a world ruled by death and change.

Considering the significant parallels between Lamentations and The Dream Songs, it is not surprising that each poem uses the image of a predatory animal and his hapless victims to depict God and his people, respectively. In Lamentations, the princes of Jerusalem are likened to "harts that find no pasture," fleeing in weakness "before the pursuer" (1:6).[29] The second stanza of Dream Song 56 depicts a similar flight:

The tinchel closes. Terror, & plunging, swipes.

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[29]Although not specifically named, the "pursuer" can be identified as God, who is depicted elsewhere as a divine hunter, setting traps to ensnare his people.

I lay my ears back. I am about to die.

My cleft feet drum.

Fierce, the two-footers club. My green world pipes

a finish--for us all, my love, not some.

Crumpling, I--why,--

The two stanzas surrounding this description of the slaughter of a deer notably address Berryman's spiritual concerns. The first stanza, as Haffenden shows in his critical commentary, alludes to Origen's doctrine of apocatastasis, the notion that all souls, including Satan's, will be redeemed at the end of time. The third stanza, in turn, poses the relevant question of why God turns a deaf ear to the pleas of his creatures: "what roar solved once the dilemma of the Ancient of Days,/what sigh borrowed His mercy[?]".

In the second stanza, Henry is presented as a deer as he is brutally clubbed to death. The tinchel, or circle of hunters who gradually close in upon a number of deer, surrounds him and his companions, causing an intense reaction of fear. Henry is clearly a pure animal, as in the case of the princes of Jerusalem, for Berryman specifically alludes to his "cleft feet." The animal's attempts to flee are futile, for the "two-footers club" with ferocity and cause his "green world" to come to "a finish." Not only are the speaker and his companions murdered, but their entire community is symbolically eradicated, as is evident in the animal's observation that the world is ending for "us all." The final question posed by the animal as it crumples, "I--why[?]", is of particular significance. To begin with, the animal recognizes that the death of his companions results from the death of his own being--the "I." Secondly, the speaker's two words echo Christ's final lament, "My God, my God, *why* hast thou forsaken *me*?" (Mk. 15:34 my emphasis). However, Berryman's placement of the "I" before the "why" suggests that it is the animal that has rejected God, rather than the reverse. Placed in a horrific predicament, the defiant speaker retaliates verbally before being silenced.

In Lamentations, the divine figure is most notably likened to a "bear lying in wait" and "a lion in secret places" who drags the poet from his path to mangle and abandon (3:11). God is presented as both of these beasts in The Dream Songs. His indifference is investigated in Song 120, when he is envisioned as an immense bear who is stalked by the dog-like poet. After recognizing the futility of shouting or murmuring to a deaf divine entity, the poet uses his courage, emotional senses, and his "nose in all directions" to detect his "foes." As the "biggest bear," God is, significantly, hibernating in an Arctic cave, oblivious to the plight of other creatures. The "Maker" is also portrayed as a lion, or "a careless monster" who takes "the claws with the purr" (DS 317). A malicious beast, he waits until his victim is vulnerable before beginning "the next/assault on his divided soul."

It is interesting to note that in both of these Songs, Henry's encounter with the beast occurs in what can be described as the semiotic realm. In Song 317, a poem that will be discussed in greater detail in the following subsection, the reader is introduced immediately to the maternal in its most powerful and vindictive state. After being physically attacked by his mother, Henry joyfully enters the realm of dreams, only to be threatened again by his "Maker." God, in other words, is negatively associated with the mother and her womb, and therefore with "the semiotic." In Song 120, however, Henry appears to recognize the importance of revealing the maternal aspect of God. Moving from the world of utterances--language being associated with the symbolic--he enters a higher realm in which the air is "sublime." Crawling into the bowels of a womblike "cave," he attempts to determine "the rectal temperature" of the divine bear, probing, in other words, "a hidden inside" and "a buried authenticity" (PH 189).[30] From earth, God

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[30]The bear, with its maternal characteristics, can be likened to the maternal "chora," a totality formed by energy charges and drives associated with the semiotic.

appears indifferent, I believe, because the maternal, "semiotic," preverbal side of him is completely cut off from humanity.[31] Henry, like the poet and writer, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, in the tenth chapter of Powers of Horror, recognizes that "Everything is already written outside of man in the sky," and therefore, in leaving the earth behind, attempts to uncover the concealed aspects of God, cleaning up, in a sense, "a sort of hidden medal, a statue buried in loam" (PH 189). Eventually, Henry ends up tottering on the "lip of the cliff." As if balanced on the verge of spiritual rebirth, he stands at the limits of a great void.

"YOUR GUTS ARE SHOWING"

The destruction of boundaries evident in Berryman's negation of the human/animal difference is even more striking in his use of graphic images of corporeal alteration. Henry, throughout The Dream Songs, appears to be in a perpetual state of physical decay, endlessly seeping, suffering dismemberment and exposure, changing dimensionally and spatially, and vacillating between functioning as a living organism and a corpse. He is, inarguably, more abominable, from a biblical perspective, than any leper, for his identity is literally shattered in a constant process of arrangement and rearrangement more violent, excessive, and grotesque than any skin condition. Furthermore, the erasure of differences between the self and the other is so extreme in Henry's case, that he is unable to differentiate his internal turmoil from external reality, his actions from his fantasies, or even life from death. What makes his condition most

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[31]God, of course, does not necessarily choose to be a distant entity. Through the patriarchal, symbolic biblical narratives, his maternal side has been surpressed and rendered unavailable to his adherents.

disturbing is the fact that the destruction of Henry's corporeal and psychic being is not always imposed upon him. Many of his wounds are self-inflicted and even invited.

Damage to Henry's identity begins, notably, in the womb. In her discussion of the self's "clean and proper body" in chapter four of Powers of Horror (101), Kristeva examines the connection between the maternal body and decay in Leviticus. The analogous fantasy of childbirth, she argues, evokes images of "a violent act of expulsion through which the nascent body tears itself away from the matter of maternal insides" (101). The womb, which once enclosed and protected the fetus, is transformed from a nourishing force to a destructive power. Because the skin apparently never ceases to bear traces of the birthing process, the fantasy of the born body converges with the reality of leprosy. The individual's resulting need to engage in a drastic movement away from the mother with whom a "pre-Oedipal identification is intolerable," forces him to give birth to himself by envisioning "his own bowels as the precious fetus of which he is to be delivered" (101). Nevertheless, because they link him to the abject or the "non-introjected mother who is incorporated as devouring, and intolerable" (102), his bowels must be seen as abominable. The "obsession of the leprous and decaying body would thus be the fantasy of a self-rebirth on the part of a subject who has not introjected his mother but has incorporated a devouring mother" (102). He is, phantasmatically, the "solitary obverse of a cult of the Great Mother: a negative and demanding identification with her imaginary power" (102).

The significance of the womb and the "devouring mother" are issues of considerable importance to Berryman, who was involved in what can be described as an incestuous and co-dependent relationship with his mother. In a conversation with William Heyen, he observed,

> "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 him a little little poem 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." (60)

Although he considered the loss of the protective and generative womb as tragic, albeit inevitable, Berryman struggled with paradoxical feelings concerning the mother's enveloping influence. His own mother, in an attempt to become all "that [her] mother was not to" her (Kelly 368), smothered him with an intense and overbearing love. Berryman was expected to become, according to Richard J. Kelly, "a husband surrogate" (6), and would eventually speak, through Alan Severance, of his "unspeakably powerful possessive adoring MOTHER" (RE 80). In his journal, Severance explores this strange woman who he views as "SEDUCTIVE--'beautiful' forcible, but v. feminine," yet resents because of her refusal to "let go of me in *any* degree--eg. *in*terminable letters, clips, incessant battering harangue" (RE 81). In light of Kristeva's alignment of the mother with the cult of the Great Mother, it is important to note that Martha Little considered motherhood to be a divine position in many respects. In a story written in 1931 when her eldest son was sixteen, Little describes her relationship with him as an infant as one that briefly enabled her to become "god," acting as the "all-giver" to "the captive of her bounty" (DH 4).

Henry, Berryman's counterpart, is, of course, forced to grapple with this powerful maternal entity, a female who no longer functions as a beneficent, nurturing, generative power, but assumes the position of a destructive goddess. She appears, in Song 212, as an "armed mother" who reigns as an archaic force in the "night with her knives." In Song 100, her "great strength" and "hope superhuman" command Henry's adulation, despite being qualities that have the potential to make him childish, considering her "Goddess-like mastery of her son who cannot match a 'superhuman' ideal" (BG 302). Her divine and punitive nature is revealed in Song 317, for she throws, as Henry observes, "a tantrum on a high terrace/hurling down water-bombs on my brother & me" after a frenzied episode in both a restaurant and on the street, simply because her son has "picked out for her a

peach sweet/instead of one with a Catholic name" (317). His mother, positioned strategically above her sons, is, as Mancini observes, a

> childish Goddess refusing her son's ritual offering ("peach sweet") and inhibiting his association with other women ("peach sweet") who are not of her religion. (BG 301)

She is perceived, as Kristeva would conclude, as a malicious, intolerable threat from which Henry must extricate himself.

In another grim Song in which the word "mother" is associated with death, and her womb with a tomb, Berryman declares, "Womb was the word, where Henry never developed" (270). He has, as Mancini observes, neither "unfolded" nor "grown out of his mother's" restrictive embrace at this point (BG 298). In the first stanza of the poem, the speaker accuses his mother of deceiving him, "fox[ing]" him into believing that he can "flower into power/& bloom" despite being constricted in her womblike embrace. He is also angry, according to Mancini, for the existential reason that she has given birth to him in the first place, making eventual physical death an inevitable prospect. He therefore implores her to "make room" so that he can reenter the womb. It is possible that Henry may need to symbolically "die in his mother's womb to birth himself anew in her eyes," and "to free himself from her undeveloping word" (BG 303).

The process of "rebirth" is a violent one. Henry's attempts to completely "finish her off" fail, for he leaves his mother "Halfway," with "the right side of her head/a'gone" (DS 270). Mancini clarifies the ambiguous usage of words in this Song, arguing that despite his attempts to achieve individuation, Henry is unable to

> destroy his mother in Nazi-like revenge ("finish her off"), or to make her whole ("finish her off"). "Halfway" to his own wholeness, he leaves her halved by rightfully wrenching himself--"the right side of her head"--from her influence, thereby demolishing her righteousness "the right side of her head." His action diminishes her "strength to speak," but he has needed to be "cured forever" of the

> "coffin cough" of her tomb-like word or womb so that he can be "enroute back to the womb" of his own Word. (BG 305)

The idiomatic word "a'gone," incidentally, connects this poem with "Henry's Confession," with its statement, "in a modesty of death I join my father/who dared so long agone leave me" (DS 76). Whereas Henry longs to remove himself from the maternal menace by obliterating his mother in Song 270, he attempts to unite himself with the masculine presence--his father--in Song 76.

Henry's identity continues to be eroded after his first tragic expulsion from the womb. Following the "departure," or the suicide of his father, in Dream Song 1, the young Henry is so violently "pried/open for all the world to see," that the speaker expresses amazement at the child's survival. The image of being "pried open" contains several connotations, as Joel Conarroe shows. To begin with, Henry can be likened to an oyster pried open for its pearl, for he is, in Song 25, appropriately referred to as "valved." Another interpretation posed by Conarroe is the possibility that the phrase relates to the image, in Song 91, of Henry, like Lazarus, being exposed in his removal from the grave. Finally, the image of Henry being pried open suggests that "secrets" and the "knowledge of intimate details" are extracted from Henry, who has been put on display and subjected to "the world's scrutiny" (Conarroe 113). The world, no longer a single woolen lover, becomes "a manipulative, impersonal 'they'" (113).

The theme of exposure resurfaces in Song 8, a poem in which Henry faces, once again, corporeal and psychological damage in the hands of an indeterminate "they." His vivisectors amputate his teeth, his crotch, and portions of his hair, while pronouncing, with their "iron voices," that "Underneath," there "is nothing" (8). Henry's senses are also targeted, for "burning thumbs" are pushed into his ears, while "all his eyes" are weakened (8)--his multiple eyes representing, I believe, the various ways in which he perceives his world socially, culturally, and spiritually. As in the first Song, and Song 86 which features him lying "clear as any onion-peel/in any sandwich," Henry describes being

mercilessly exposed when these individuals "lifted off/his covers till he showed, and cringed & pled/to see himself less." The violation does not end with the removal or inhibition of various body parts and exposure, however, for mirrors were installed "till he flowed." Furthermore, the expectation is placed upon Henry that he focus on those who violate him rather than on his seeping interior. Clearly, Henry's sexual and psychological identity is shattered in these metaphorical images of precise and strategic physiological torture.

Being pried open is only one of Henry's concerns, for he must also contend with the challenges posed by his own inconsistent, shifting body. As if to reinforce his belief that it is ludicrous to attempt to define and reduce Henry, or his creator, into a homogeneous identity, Berryman emphasizes the fact that even his character's corporeal dimensions are in a constant state of flux. Henry's body, in other words, ebbs and wanes, often in concurrence with the movements of his mind. For example, "Henry widens" in Song 12 and possesses not only a "wide mind" that is likened to a river in Song 182, but is physically able to hold "the world up like a big sea-shell," metaphorically speaking, of course. Henry also "broods & recedes" (140), "collapsing" (85), "vanishing" (140), and growing "smaller & smaller" (78). There is, Berryman explains, "something bizarre about Henry," for he is "slowly sheared/off, unlike you & you" (78). Ironically, Henry requests, in Song 25, to be reduced "to the rest of us," although this very reduction sets him apart from others in Song 78. He is, indisputably, permanently different from other humans, whether tightened "into a ball," tucked, or "elongate[d]" (25).

At times, Henry's fixation with his bodily parts becomes a central focus in the Songs. From Song 163 to Song 170, for example, the reader is introduced to several of Henry's specific parts that ache, malfunction, or seep. His mood, incidentally, fluctuates drastically in this sequence of poems, for he approaches pain with a melodramatic sense of humour at one moment, only to address the issue of suffering with a grim intensity and philosophical outlook the next. A difference in the extent to which he is injured from

poem to poem is also notable, for the pain gradually spreads like a disease.[32] Whereas Henry marvels--almost objectively--at an injured body part, distancing himself from it, he eventually succumbs to an all-encompassing pain that renders him incapable of distinguishing his artistic and psychological identity from his physiological identity.

The sequence of poems begins on a relatively light note, for Henry states, as if reciting a nursery rhyme,

> Stomach & arm, stomach & arm
> Henry endured like a pain-farm.
> Nine o'clock, ten.
> He worked all day & then he workt all night
> and nothing that he made would tot out right
> again. (163)[33]

Pain, in this example, simply acts as a source of irritation and distraction. In the following Song, Henry's physical problems become a central focus, although they are presented in a humorous light. Henry becomes a playful, hyperactive, and almost maniacal character who "springs youthfully" like "a dancer," absurdly complains that his friends' bodies are still "intact," and mourns the fact that this "world [is] so ill arranged" that individuals, such as "William," do not have the courtesy to "break at least a collar-bone" (164). Not surprisingly, Henry's doctors despair over their patient's condition,

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[32]The abject is, as Elizabeth Gross observes, like an "infection," for it is "autonomous and engulfing" (90).

[33]The description of Henry's broken humerous is likely related to Berryman's experience with a broken wrist. As Philip Levine, Berryman's former student, recalls in "Mine Own John Berryman," he first encountered the poet with "his arm encased in a black sling," contrasting dramatically with "his customary blue blazer" (21).

frequently prescribing new medication in a futile attempt to ascertain "what must be best for wilful Henry" (164). As if to defy any attempts made to heal him, Henry boldly and mischievously declares that since three of his limbs and three quarters of his life have been "smashed," he has only one limb and one season left to destroy. The reader is forced to envision a "smiling" Henry falling through the air while he describes, in almost whimsical terms, his descent. What makes the image particularly unusual is the fact that the beaming Henry strategically plummets through "the air below" and "the air above," and takes pains not to "neglect" the "middle air as well." His actions can be said to represent a symbolic disregard for biblical standards of intermixture and disorder, for he does not confine himself to a single state, but deliberately and blatantly embraces disorder and intermixture by moving from one level of space to another.

In Song 165, a less youthful and rambunctious Henry continues to endure the pain caused by a "fractured humerus," emphasizing that there is nothing "humorous" about the condition of his "fiery arm." Aside from this "delinquent member," his body, however "prostrate" and "busy with [its] break," is still in relatively good condition, for Henry is able to wiggle his fingers and toes like a "sound" person. In the next Song, however, he marvels that he has managed to "strain[ ] everything" except for his ears, which were dull to begin with. His "eyes, his brain, his nervous system," and "nearly all [of] the rest of him" have come "to harm" (166). The pain, in this case, is both rooted in, and merges outwards into other aspects of his life. His discovery of art, for example, begins with his search for new ears, while the destruction of his nervous system is intimately related to Henry's struggle and strain to create "a beginning," or, in other words, a new form of artistic expression.

The intensity of Henry's physical torment reaches its climax in Song 168, in which he is gashed, rendered sightless by fear, wounded like Christ, and forced to relate

experiences so horrific that his tongue "thickens," rendering him speechless.[34] Following this grave poem, however, Henry optimistically concludes that he will soon experience physical healing, or the "miracle of one recovered arm," which will enable him to "scratch his baffled head" without being reminded of his injury (169), and to regain his composure and indomitable character. He insists, in the next poem, that people allow "one-armed Henry [to] be" (170), then ceases to mention his injured member. Only six poems later, however, his torment is renewed, although the pain surfaces in a different form. Henry expresses, in Song 176, his fear that he will one day remove his sock only to discover that "the skin will come with it," causing him to "run blood, horrible on the floor." The healing process does little more than briefly interrupt Henry's perpetual cycle of physical deterioration.

It is, perhaps, the prospect of death that inflicts the greatest physiological torment on Henry. In Song 144, he describes being inextricably linked to death, for even as a child, "death grew tall/up Henry as a child." As he ages, the power of its presence increases, for he "feels his death tugging within him" and likens it to an iron pear which, crammed into his mouth, "swells up to four times ordinary size/slowly cracking his skull open (144). This image is horrific, for the process of dying is gradual, and the victim, although completely aware of what must happen, is powerless. The pear can be viewed, I believe, as a concrete symbol of the abject. It is, as Kristeva would observe, something that lies quite close, yet cannot be assimilated; a "terror that dissembles" (4); a "brutish suffering that "I" puts up with" (2); the impossible within; yet is something that cannot be vomited or expelled.

The violation of boundaries between the acceptable and abominable is most evident in Henry's inability to differentiate life from death, or his ability to cross the

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[34]I will discuss "The Old Poor" in greater detail in the following chapter.

boundaries separating the two at will, and his absurd existence as a living, breathing corpse. The fourth section of The Dream Songs, consisting of the "Op. Posth." poems, primarily features, as Conarroe observes, themes of physical and mental diminution, castration, and decay.[35] In many of these Songs it is difficult to ascertain whether Henry is, in fact, technically living or dead. In Song 78, for example, a disintegrating Henry actually stands among his "relaxed & hard" deceased poetic ancestors, while in Song 88 he merely visits "the violent dead," picking "their awful brains" and confronting the abject through the process of reading. In Song 79, Henry is laid upon a litter and is said to "flare[ ] out of history/& the obituary in *The New York Times*," while in Song 87, "word is had" that "Henry may be returning to our life/adult & difficult." He absurdly claims to miss what appears to be his "deteriorating & hopeless" body in Song 80, although it has been buried at his own insistence. And in "the last of these remarkable messages from the grave," Song 91, a living Henry ironically attempts to unearth his own coffin and corpse, like Lazarus "with a plan/to get his own back." In the most literal sense possible, death, as Kristeva would observe, infects life. The corpse is, indeed, "something rejected from which one does not part" (PH 4).

The following section, consisting of Songs 92 to 146, documents what Conarroe describes as "a symbolic faring forth" (89), in which Henry, despite longing for oblivion,

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[35]Conarroe argues that The Dream Songs are strategically divided into seven sections, each of which

> suggests in microcosm the overall pattern of the work as a whole, moving from a prying open to a resolution, from imagery of arrival and spring to that of departure and autumn. Each [section] ends with a sense of summing up, a moment of stasis, and it is this stasis, or suspension of process, that the beginning of each new section disrupts in images of renewal. (87)

is compelled to take action. Once again, the boundaries between life and death are indistinguishable. In "Room 231: the forth week," a hospitalized Henry grows as "still as his cadaver," waking only to begin marching south. He is placed, significantly, in contrast to the "[f]lesh-coloured men & women" who "come & punt" beneath his windows (92). He himself is encased in a coffin-like, "flowerless land" where the hours are "timeless," and his only course of action against the living under his windows is to "rave or grunt." Suffering from the sensation of suffocation and plagued by nerves which rattle, Henry's existence is that of a corpse's, although he is lively enough to awaken and express his disgust with those who blatantly exhibit their complete well-being.

In addition to being unable to restrain the outward flow of his seeping innards, to control his erratic and inconsistent physiological boundaries, and to remain solidly planted in either the realm of the living or the dead, Henry is incapable of differentiating his interior decomposition from the condition of his external environment.[36] In other words, he transfers his own personal breakdown and the violence he is forced to endure onto his surroundings. I am not suggesting, of course, that the world in which Henry lives is by any means unmarked by violence. However, there is a distinctive pattern in The Dream Songs in which fantasy infiltrates into what Henry perceives as reality. In Song 130, for example, Henry dreams that his friend is "covered in blood." Although he recognizes that he will inevitably "wake up," and does, in fact, discover that his friend is alive in reality, "adhering to an elite group/in California," Henry continues to be tormented by the vision years later, ironically questioning, "Why did I never wake, when

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[36]The blending of the interior and exterior is a critical way in which Henry diverges from Christ. Whereas both individuals deliberately violate boundaries related to food taboos and restrictions concerning corporeal alteration, Christ interiorizes abjection, creating a boundary between the inside and outside, which Henry clearly fails to regard.

covered with blood/I saw my fearful friend [?]". Henry's "fearful friend," as Mancini observes, is really "an integral and indispensable part of Henry," the part of Henry "which incarnates the deep pain he fears and at times strives to ignore" (BG 283). Despite his distancing of his pain, Henry even

> inadvertently identifies himself with his "friend" when Henry's syntactical ambiguity attributes the phrase "when covered in blood" to both himself and his "friend." Their essential connectiveness is underlined also by the fact that the dream "friend" seeks contact with Henry by speaking to him even if Henry cannot or will not hear. When Henry questions, "Why did I never wake," the "I" is at once that of Henry's conscious self and that of his dream "friend." . . . His non-acceptance of his "friend" as a part of him contributes to forming the "rack" on which his friend is "stretcht" in bloody anguish, and from which he cannot "wake" to become part of Henry's consciousness. (283-4)

Clearly, reality collides with Henry's disturbed mental condition and fragmented interior to form a strange state that lies between dreaming and awakening.

What is most striking in the process of the intermixture of the interior and exterior is the fact that women are consistently victimized. Even when observing acts of violence that he has not committed personally, Henry focuses specifically on the destruction of women, graphically exhibiting, as Kristeva would observe, the results of the domination of the symbolic over the semiotic. In Song 135, Henry relates the stories of Speck and Whitman, specifically emphasizing how Speck "put a knife in *her* eye," and how Whitman "murdered his *wife & mother*" (my emphasis).[37] Even in his own fantasies

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[37]As Haffenden notes, Richard Benjamin Speck committed mass murder on July 14, 1966, while Charles Joseph Whitman mounted the tower of the University of Texas in August of 1966, shooting forty-four people, and killing thirteen (CC 107).

of violence, Henry's victims are consistently female. As I have previously discussed, Henry responds to his mother with brutality in Song 270, partially finishing "her" off and leaving "the right side of her head a'gone" because of his own lack of development in the womb. Likewise, in Song 29, upon feeling the weight of the heavy "thing" on his heart, Henry is tormented by the possibility that his inner turmoil has merged with the realities of other individuals. His own existence is unreal, in a sense, for although his "open eyes" gaze attentively, he is "blind" (29), and to live in a state of reality requires "the popping back in of eyes" (DS 195).[38] Trapped in a state so dark and confused that even the past and present become jumbled verbally, Henry's terror is all too real:

> But never did Henry, as he thought he did,
> end anyone and hacks her body up
> and hide the pieces, where they may be found.
> He knows: he went over everyone, & nobody's missing. (29)

The reader is left to question the identity of the Henry's proposed victim and to observe that there is a distinct misogynistic element in Henry's disoriented act of violence. In Song 271, Henry awaits the appearance of another unidentified "her"--a female that could be his child or lover--and plans to "fix her," to "burp her till she bleeds," and to "take an ax to her inability to focus."

Henry's sexual relations, in addition to being reduced to acts performed by animals, are also associated with disintegration and the dismantling of the human body into its individual elements. Although the poems involving his reduction of women in to

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[38]In his essay, "Things Are Going to Pieces," Jerold M. Martin explores Henry's puzzling preoccupation with eyes in his visions of dismemberment and reconstitution. Henry attempts, Martin argues, to "quiet his screaming pieces" by "imagining a restoration of the dislocated eyes," the "conspicuous objects of removal in several Dream Songs (199).

their mere body parts are as not as graphic as the images of Henry hacking a woman to pieces, there is, however subtle or indirect, a similar, distinctive violent undertone evident in Henry's lust and sexual escapades. In Song 350, for example, Henry reduces the girls who visit him in a dream to their "vivacious littles," their "tops & bottoms" and their "middles," while the Sheriff muses that Henry has "been getting away with *murder*" for years, the italicized "*murder*" not being used solely in a whimsical or casual sense. Although the poem is exceptionally humorous, one cannot ignore the fact that serious issues, including sexual infidelity and alcoholism, are being addressed. Another example of Henry's urge to not merely cross boundaries himself, but to dissect, divide, and dismember, is evident in his lust for the young married woman in the farcical restaurant episode in Song 4. As Vendler observes, this woman "is reduced to her body engaged in the inglorious act of eating" and to the "wonders" she is sitting on (37).

In Song 69, Henry expresses his intense feelings of desire for "a personal experience of the body of Mrs Boogry," and reduces her to her physical parts by lusting over "every least part of that infernal & unconscious woman." Toying with violent misogynistic language, Henry remarks that he "deserves it all," including the woman's body and the "pain." The ambiguous word "pain" may refer to his own torment and the fact that he should, technically, suffer for his immoral thoughts, as is suggested in the statement, "God help Henry." However, the pain may also be experienced by the young woman, a possibility which is somewhat disturbing considering Henry's intense desire to inflict or possess it, and the ambiguity of the word "unconscious." Even more disturbing is the possibility that his statement, "God help Henry," may not be merely a casual statement or a recognition of his sinful state, but a request that God assist him in his sexual conquest. This latter interpretation is certainly possible despite its brutality, for similar violent sentiments are repeated in Song 355, in which Henry assures a lover that if she clings to him, he will ensure that she'll "drown too," and that he will "take [her] beauty down" to be "ruined in sea weed." Although he describes how the couple's love

grew "[d]ifficult at midnight," and claims that "*we* could not have enough" (my emphasis), suggesting mutual sexual desire, he addresses the woman as a "reluctant lady," observes that "Nobody in the world knows where I am," remarks on how her "hair drags," and makes the disconcerting compliment, "You would have made a terrific victim/ in one of Henry's thrillers."

It would initially appear, from an examination of these Songs, that Berryman, despite attempting to violate every law established in Leviticus, ironically upholds the Old Testament's subordination of maternal and female reproductive power to a patriarchal symbolic order. However, The Dream Songs is a remarkably paradoxical and contradictory work. Henry literally sits "on the fence," "roiling & babbling & braining" (36), and making one definitive statement, only to adopt an opposing viewpoint. Although he challenges the subordination of women with remarkable gravity, he simultaneously objectifies them, flaunting his sexual conquests and reducing them to their biological rudiments with a mixture of absurd humour and intense hatred. Challenging the patriarchy constructed in the Old Testament, he is nevertheless unwilling to uphold the virtues of a matriarchy, or assume a feminist stance. Instead, Henry acknowledges everything, while committing to nothing. Henry is, indeed, as much of a philanderer as his creator, frequently perceives women as the root source of all of his problems, and, perhaps rightfully, envisions his mother as a menace from which he must extricate himself.

Of course, one cannot assume that Henry is, by any means, an exemplary figure whose behaviour is celebrated, despite his position as a prophet and poet. He is, in addition to being a noble character who "alone breasts the wronging tide" (172), a product of his environment. Included within his multi-faceted character is a man who, rendered impotent and humiliated by the indeterminate "they," is given no recourse but to lash out violently against the indeterminate "her." Henry is, I believe, placed in a position in which he simultaneously empathizes with female victims and acts as the perpetrator.

Therefore, in Song 355, after reducing his lover to a "terrific victim," Henry significantly implores her to recognize his deplorable condition as a man:

> Weep for the fate of man, excellent lady.
> He comes no near, whereas he is so lost,
> a crisis in the ghost
> baffles endeavour, so he would lie down.
> Attend his sorry perish, excellent lady.
> Withhold from him your frown. (355)

The "excellent lady" is, notably, exalted after being reduced.

There is also a definite recognition on Henry's part that behind the malicious mothers and brides intent on "biting off the penises" of their husbands (DS 124), there are equally deplorable or irresponsible males, one of which is God himself. The symbolic order that subordinates the maternal with its patriarchal restrictions is, in other words, as potentially destructive as unbridled feminine power. Henry, therefore, periodically becomes a women's advocate, challenging the devouring father. In "His Helplessness," for example, he laments the way in which a young lady has been victimized by "pants in their desire," for after being molested "by her father aged ten," she grew up, tragically, "into the world of men/who headed ha for her" (DS 375). Henry declares that if it were not for the distance separating the two, he would offer "help to the delicate lady far in her strait," providing her with the "counsel she needs." He even looks with his "heart" into the darkness of "her disordered soul," connecting intimately with her as a fellow sufferer. In Song 358 he grieves for the same woman, questioning, "Can so much pain inhabit a simple body [?]", and momentarily forgetting his own disintegrating, dismantled being.

Images of the absent father compete with, and even outweigh those of the devouring mother in The Dream Songs. In Henry's description of the killings of Whitman's "wife & mother," for example, the fact that the murderer's "empty father" taught "him to respect guns/(not persons)" is emphasized, placed as the final word at the

end of the poem (135). In Berryman's own life, as Mancini notes, his "mother's smothering was not counterpointed by a strong fathering principle" ("Couvade" 171). In addition to feeling threatened "by the *vagina dentata* of the archetypal mother, which he fought by maintaining an often belligerent if not violent, priapic, pseudomasculine posture toward the many mothering women he--ironically--sought out," Berryman was prevented, through his father's suicide, from developing a "firm identification with the masculine principle" (172). His only recourse was to actualize his wholeness, recognizing his "feminine as well as his masculine characteristics" (170). Accordingly, Henry, in Song 372, vows to protect the "high heroine," who, as Arpin argues, is most likely an aspect of himself, "an emotional and spiritual aspect which was frozen by the death of his father and the loss of God" (69). Assuming the role of a rescue figure, Henry proclaims that he will protect the woman with "a great hound" until her lover arrives. He stands, in Song 291, between this woman and the bears that inhabit the frigid wilderness in which she is trapped, bears which symbolize "a threatening God and the father figure" (Arpin 69). She will, Henry affirms, only let "one man in," for "One is enough" (372).

One of the most striking paradoxes in The Dream Songs is evident in the fact that despite expressing considerable grief at the physical and psychological wounds inflicted upon him, Henry simultaneously possesses a masochistic desire to be violated and to have his innards exposed. His metaphorical wounds are frequently either self-inflicted, or result from a deliberate choice to offer himself up as a victim. In Song 67, for example, Henry's counterpart, Mr. Bones, boasts that although he does not "operate often," people react with amazement and "take note" when he does, for "the patient," who is, in all probability, himself, "is brought back to life, or so." He is, he declares, "obliged to perform in complete darkness/operations of great delicacy" on himself (67), and eventually succeeds in either dying or restoring himself, ambiguously replying "My/ friend, I succeeded," to Henry's despairing question, "Will you die?".

Despite being terrified by Mr. Bones's macabre hobby, Henry engages in a similar violent practice, placing himself "on a machine in the penal colony/without a single regret" (DS 310), and evoking a horrific image derived from Franz Kafka's novella, In The Penal Colony. The apparatus that Berryman speaks of uses needles to repeatedly inscribe words into the body of a gagged, bound, and exposed prisoner, frequently before a party of observers. At the sixth hour, when death is imminent, the victim is said to reach enlightenment, finally deciphering the words gouged into his flesh. Like the officer at the conclusion of the story, Berryman chooses to voluntarily experience this unspeakable form of torture, losing his identity at the same time his corporeal boundaries are irrevocably violated. As Denis Donoghue observes, Henry "has only to name a victim" to become that victim (24), losing his own self in the process. Incidentally, the corresponding gesture in Berryman is to sacrifice his single voice "for the sake of other voices," Donoghue argues, giving up his "egotistical sublimity" to accept "the modest role of medium" (24).

It is, ironically, through the abominable process of decay and dismemberment that Henry is able to express himself artistically. Although he suffers profusely, he is freed, through the process of disintegration, from the oppressive restraints of the symbolic and the rigid expectations placed upon him as a writer. Berryman himself, as Saul Bellow observes in his introduction to Recovery, gave up the ultimate sacrifice for the sake of art:

> What he needed for his art had been supplied by his own person, by his mind, his wit. He drew it out of his vital organs, out of his very skin. At last there was not more . . . The cycle of resolution, reform and relapse had become a bad joke which could not continue. (79)

As in the case of his creator, Henry writes "with his stomach," and specifically uses his brain, breath, liver, and energy in order to "flourish[ ] like a sycamore tree" (DS 328). He pours himself out through his tips, stating that the blood must "bang[ ]" and "faint with

necessity" (221), and likening his artistic process to that of Renoir's, who paints with his penis. In order to write with the very essence of his life, Henry is compelled to stab his arm, draw blood, and write a letter about how poorly the world has treated him, consequently tasting "all the secret bits of life" (74). Even his body is driven to produce creative works. Although divided by his insatiable appetite for women, cigarettes, and alcohol, Henry's "pieces sat up & wrote," ignoring "their piecedom" and continuing to express themselves "among the chaos" (311). In The Dream Songs, violence and disintegration are inextricably and paradoxically linked to beauty, artistic expression, and creation.

"BITS OF OUTER GOD"

In addition to its animal imagery, the book of Lamentations features images of decay pertinent to The Dream Songs and its theme of disintegration. Like Henry, the biblical poet is mauled by external perpetrators, flows from within, and describes, with distress, the brutal acts of cannibalism and violence that he has witnessed. Jerusalem, for whom he speaks, has become an unclean thing, "a menstruous woman" (Lam. 1:17) whose "nakedness" has been exposed and whose body has been trampled (1:8). Like Henry, who is pried open like a pearl, she is exploited when her adversary places "his hand upon all her pleasant things" and when "the heathen enter[ ] into her sanctuary" (1:10). Her boundaries are violated by God himself, who has "purposed to destroy the wall" around her (2:8), tearing down her ramparts and walls, and breaking the bars of her gate. She is, in a sense, sexually violated in a brutal fashion by this masculine perpetrator.

The poet of Lamentations suffers from a fate similar to that of his nation's, for his "bowels are troubled," his liver "poured upon the ground," and his eyes blinded with "tears" (2:11). His bones are broken, his teeth smashed, and his skin and flesh altered through the process of premature deterioration. He is, in a sense, a living corpse, for God has placed him "in dark places, as they that be dead of old" (3:6). Furthermore, like

Henry, whose internal deterioration is evident in his environment, the poet of Lamentations is acutely aware of the suffering that is taking place outside of himself. He mourns for the women who "have sodden their own children," using them as "their meat" (4:10), and the prophets and priests who are so defiled "with blood that men c[an]not touch their garments" (4:14). In these scenes of intense turmoil, there are no boundaries between the prophet's internal experience and the external scenes to which he is exposed.

The connections between Lamentations and The Dream Songs are numerous, and their commentaries on God, almost identical. To begin with, in both works, to be unclean and abominable is to be a victim as well. The detestable is, frequently, deplorable by no fault of its own. Secondly, the human patriarchy is subject to criticism. Because, as the poet of Lamentations notes, "Our fathers have sinned, and are not," their innocent offspring have unfairly "borne their iniquities" (5:7). Similarly, Henry complains, in the Songs, that because his father "tore his page/out" (384), committing the sin of suicide, Henry is left, by no fault of his own, "to live on" (145). He pleads in vain for mercy, warning his father, "do not pull the trigger/or all my life I'll suffer from your anger" (235). Thirdly, the divine patriarchy is questioned, for God has completely rejected--from the perspective of both poets--those who he has a moral responsibility to love. In Lamentations, the pagans themselves are repulsed by God's former people, ironically labeling them unclean. Even more ironic is the fact that the Lord himself has "divided them," and "will no more regard them" (4:16). As Henry so eloquently expresses, "His love must be a very strange thing indeed,/ considering its products" (DS 256).

It is through the irresponsibility and downright cruelty of the father, both divine and human, that the feminine, in particular, is metaphorically victimized and subordinated. In Lamentations, Jerusalem is tragically transformed from a position of power as a "queen" to a servile role as slave; from a partner complementing the masculine principle, to a widow (1:1); and from the "perfection of beauty" to an object of scorn (2:15). As I have previously discussed, Henry also questions the patriarchy and

even empathizes, at times, with female victims of male sexual tyranny. Although neither the poet of Lamentations nor Henry would advocate the renewal of a pagan maternal force, there is, I believe, a recognition by both of the need for a more balanced share of power, if not the obliteration of the patriarchy and matriarchy altogether.

Unlike the poet in Lamentations however, Henry is so bold as to envision God himself as a shattered, fragmented entity. Henry's agenda concerning God and any other ruling power, is obvious, for in Song 314, he casually questions whether there are "any other gods he could defy" or "re-arrange." In Song 80, he approaches the topic of the "great Uh" with the statement that,

> Goodness is bits of outer God. The house-guest
> (slimmed-down) with one eye open & one breast
> out.

As Mancini observes, the only goodness that Henry is able to see is in fragments of God rather than in the whole. Imagining God as a "house-guest" (DS 80), Henry "projects his own reduced state onto the Divine and thus views Him as 'slimmed-down,' unable to see Henry clearly or to nurture him fully" (BG 355). Even Henry's image of an "outer God" is reductive, for as Mancini argues, "he sees Him as an unspeaking and unspeakable 'Uh' leading the lagging Henry . . . to the cold 'north face' of the mountain" (355).

In "Henry's Programme for God," after proclaiming to his creator, "You can't 'make me small'," Henry directly attacks the character of God, dismantling conceptions of him as a beneficent entity by raising the possibility that he "resembles one of the last etchings of Goya" (238). Goya's works, as Haffenden observes, were completed in 1819, when the artist was, like Henry, "deaf, isolated, and disillusioned" (CC 113), and are characterized by their bleak pessimism and inexpressible horror. Goya's vision includes "gigantic or grotesque beings with deformed faces" so disturbing that nothing "could represent more forcefully Berryman's negative vision of God" (113). Surpassing even the courage of the biblical poet, Henry boldly challenges the assumption that God is an

intelligent, sensitive being, describing him instead as "a slob,/playful, vast, rough-hewn," with a "touch of paranoia"--a monster that should be "curbed" (238). Furthermore, Henry promotes rebellion through "bleak denial" and "anti-potent rage" (238). His physiological and psychological disintegration reflects, I believe, both the horrific state of his creator and the state into which he must digress upon rebelling against this monstrous being.

CHAPTER II: "A HALF-CLOSED BOOK"

In "Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi," the fifth chapter of Powers of Horror, Julia Kristeva moves from a discussion of Old Testament Law, with its "pure/impure" distinctions, to the message of Christ and the New Testament's emphasis on an "outside/inside" dichotomy. It is significant to note, she argues, that a new arrangement of differences is established in the Gospels, one "whose economy will regulate a wholly different system of meaning," and, therefore, "a wholly different speaking subject" (113). Abjection, in these narratives, is no longer perceived as an external menace from which one can extricate oneself, but is both internal and permanent, existing within a subject that is internally divided. In order to escape the abject, the individual must continually purge himself of the intolerable threat through speech and subjection to God.

The boundaries between the exterior and interior are clearly and repetitively established in the teachings of Christ. Jesus, for example, criticizes the Pharisees for evaluating the depth and value of an individual's faith based on external appearances. Rather than focusing on an obvious target--like a leper--whose external state threatens the community, Christ states that it is these hypocrites whose conditions merit contempt and associations with death, likening them to "whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness" (Matt. 23:27). Furthermore, Jesus challenges Levitical food taboos, emphasizing that it is not "that which goeth into the mouth that defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth" (Matt. 15:11). The Pharisees are targeted, once again, for neglecting to honour their fathers and mothers sufficiently in their drive to honour God orally. Christ's message, as Kristeva argues, supports a natural, "concrete, genetic, and social authority" (115). In other words, Jesus encourages the "re-cognition" of one's parents, which leads to

the interiorization of impurity. That which was once an external threat becomes an internal danger (115).[39]

The process of "re-cognition" involves, ironically, a "full acceptance of [the] archaic and gratifying relationship to the mother" (115), despite its associations with the pagan. By elaborating on the archaic relation to one's parents, the New Testament reader is led, Kristeva explains, "to introject the drive quality attached to archaic objects."[40] Without this introjection, "pre-objects and abjects threaten from without as impurity, defilement, [and] abomination" (116). Although the process of introjection serves to alleviate torment from without, however, the menace within forms a new source of difficulty, replacing the external polluting abominable substance with the "ineradicable repulsion" of an individual's "divided and contradictory being" (116).

Through the process of interiorization, defilement combines with guilt to form sin. The subject becomes aware of the "error within his own thoughts and speech," and recognizes that transgressions against God result from defilement emanating from within, rather than from the detestable entering from without (116). The extent to which the speaking subject can be deemed an intelligent and spiritual being is based on his recognition of his internal state. Communion--the introjection of Christ, the ideal--forces

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[39]"Re-cognition" of one's parents entails, in a sense, a return to one's original state, or a symbolic inverse rebirth in which the subject is reunited with the father and mother. Rather than expelling the "milk cream" proferred by the mother and father, to use Kristeva's example of food loathing in "Approaching Abjection," the subject assimilates this element and sign of the parents' desire, thus internalizing the abject (PH 3).

[40]Upon introjection, two new drives are implanted within the subject: a lust for "swallowing up the other" emerges through "oral-dietary satisfaction," while the fear of impure nourishment results in a "deathly drive to devour the other" (118).

the sinner to recognize both the division between his body and spirit, and the incompletion of his lapsing interior. Through his participation in the ritual, as well as careful self-examination, he is expected to discern whether or not he is worthy to consume the flesh and blood of Christ. The impure assumes the form of an indecent action--often referred to as a "peccaminous" act--rather than a forbidden substance, and is dependent upon the subject's judgment. As Romans 14:14 states, "there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean."

The Eucharist, Kristeva notes, also mingles the theme of devouring with that of satiating, taming cannibalism, in a sense, and removing guilt from the "archaic relation to the first pre-object (abject) of need: the mother" (118).[41] To consume the flesh and blood of Christ is to symbolically violate Levitical prohibitions and to achieve reconciliation with paganism, to some degree. In the process of consuming the "Word" and interiorizing speech, however, the corporeal is also elevated to the realm of the spiritual. Despite the inside/outside boundary, "osmosis . . . takes place between the spiritual and the substantial, the corporeal and the signifying," creating "a heterogeneity that cannot be divided back into its components" (120).[42] Christ alone is a completely heterogeneous

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[41]Although the maternal principle is reconciled with the subject, it is, Kristeva notes, neither revalorized or rehabilitated, for its nourishing and threatening heterogeneity will only appear, in later texts, as "the idea of sinning flesh" (117).

[42]It is important to note, at this point, the distinction between the "godly" heterogeneity evident in Christ and the "sinful" heterogeneity displayed in Henry. Heterogeneity, in Kristeva's sense, refers to Christ's existence as both a spiritual and physical being. Because the corporeal is elevated to the level of the spiritual, however, Christ is, in a sense, homogeneous, or unified; although one cannot escape the fact that he is, technically, heterogeneous, or dualistic. Henry, in contrast, is fractured, possessing a

body in this sense, undefiled by sin. Although his condition is unrivaled, his existence becomes, as Kristeva argues, "the vanishing point of all fantasies and thus a universal object of faith," allowing the individual to aspire to a "Christic sublimation," while simultaneously recognizing "that his sins can be remitted" (120). Sin, as a result, becomes the only token that differentiates the individual from the sublimity of Christ, for although its remission is promised, it

> remains the rock where one endures the human condition as separate: body and and spirit, body jettisoned from the spirit; as a condition that is impossible, irreconcilable, and, by that very token, real. (120)

Nevertheless, the heterogeneity of Christ serves to reabsorb and cleanse the demoniacal, saving the sinner from the abject.

Although, logically, sin "guides one along the straitest paths of superego spirituality," it also a state of fullness and plenty rather than of debt or want, becoming, ironically, "the requisite of the Beautiful" (122). The more Christ forgives, in other words, the more capable an individual is of responding to him in love, receiving from him a deluge of an overflowing of sorts. Sin is thus "the reverse side of love" (123). Furthermore, the power of the holy is directly related to the power of the opposition that it identifies as evil, for through "means of the beautiful, the demoniacal dimension of the pagan world can be tamed" (123). The beautiful, as Kristeva explains, "penetrates into Christianity to the extent of becoming not merely one of its component parts," but a critical factor in its movement beyond mere religion.

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radical multiplicity. His physical being is not sublimated, nor can he be likened to the triune, "heterogeneous" God, an entity, biblically speaking, composed of multiple selves that peacefully coexist.

Sin is not only connected to the idea of "want," Kristeva observes, but is coupled with the notion of "an overflowing, a profusion, even an unquenchable desire, which are pejoratively branded with words like 'lust' or 'greed'" (123). Marked by an "overwhelming release of drives, unrestrained by the symbolic" (124), sin converges on the flesh. The flesh, in turn, signifies two modalities: that of the "body" with its drives that clash with the law and the "body" that becomes linked with beauty and love through its submersion in divine speech. The perverse and sublimated bodies are, incidentally, inextricably linked, the second being unable to exist without the first.

In the movement from Old Testament logic to that of the New Testament, there is, in addition to Christ's emphasis on the impurity within a man, a crucial recognition of the power inherent in discourse. The Christian confession, Kristeva argues, brings one's "most intimate subjectivity into being for the other" (129), causing one to be simultaneously authenticated and delivered over to death. Because of its connection with martyrdom, "Speech addressed to the other, not sinful speech but the speech of faith, is pain; this is what locates the act of *true communication*, the act of avowal, within the register of persecution and victimization" (129). In the process of confession, discourse is weighed down with sin. However, by "having it bear that load, which alone grants it the intensity of full communication, avowal absolves from sin, and, by the same stroke, founds the power of discourse" (130). Speech, in other words, is critical "in order to topple sin into the other" (130). Acts of atonement which serve to appease a judgmental God in the Old Testament are replaced by speech in a movement "from the judicial to the verbal" (131). It is no longer actions which free one from the abject, but an acknowledgment of one's erroneous judgment and moral culpability before the divine other. Power, as Kristeva observes, no longer belongs to God as judge, but "to discourse itself, or rather to the act of judgment expressed in speech and . . . [to] all the signs . . . that are contingent upon it" (132).

One can argue that Christ--to return to Berryman's discussion of "Slavery" and the "absence-of-Slavery"--breaks through the walls established in the Old Testament in order to obtain emancipation (RE 232). After stating, in his notes to Recovery, that Christ's liberation and "the Redemption story" are "true," Berryman argues that those who reject the notion of a God who requires walls, and implore the divine entity to remove these barriers, will discover that they "are programmed-for-happiness." As if envisioning Christ's profusion of forgiveness and the sinner's corresponding deluge of love, Berryman describes the movement away from the authoritarian, oppressive God of the Old Testament in ideal terms:

> . . . we *happily* find ourselves without walls . . . We turn back upward at once with love to the Person who has made us so happy, and *desire to serve Him.* Our state of mind is that of a bridegroom, that of a bride. We are married, who have been so lonely heretofore . . . Life lies open before us, with commitment, its interesting and difficult (but He will guide us) choices, its sweet rewards, its delightful . . . end: immortal rest. (232)

By rebelling against the confines of Old Testament Law and following the example of Christ, the reader is assured, in this excerpt from Recovery, that spiritual satisfaction will inevitably follow.

However, one cannot ignore the fact that the success of the New Testament system of logic hinges on numerous factors, or the possibility that internal walls are erected as external walls are destroyed. In order to be freed from the abject, the speaking subject must be able to accept the notion of Christ as a completely "heterogeneous" body--according to Kristeva's usage of the term--undefiled by sin. The subject must also be able to engage in rather abhorrent acts, including the "re-cognition," or introjection of his parents, and the consumption of Christ's flesh through participation in the communion ritual. Furthermore, one must be capable of responding to Christ with love and of using speech to receive absolution from sin. Failure to accept Christ and fulfill these

requirements may result in eternal damnation. Contrasting sharply with the optimism conveyed in Berryman's notes to Recovery, The Dream Songs is characterized by its bleak images, religious confusion, and frequent despair. Henry struggles to submit to the authority of his parents, is repulsed by the concept of consuming Christ, questions this figure's infallibility, and is hindered in his attempts to love and to speak. Even his quest to become a saviour inevitably fails, raising doubts pertaining to the authenticity of the historical figure who achieves, in a sense, the impossible.

Berryman grappled with many of these issues, openly acknowledging the extent to which his personal theological studies infiltrate this major work. In his interview with Paris Review, he admits that "there is a lot of theology in The Dream Songs" (Stitt 22), and observes that the narrative developed "partly out of [his] readings in theology and that sort of thing, taking place during thirteen years" (29). His engagement with Christianity consisted of a profound struggle. In his search for "a middle ground," the poet was forced, I believe, to seriously contend with this religion, a system of belief described by Kristeva as "a compromise between paganism and Judaic monotheism" (PH 116)--a "middle ground," spiritually speaking. As if coming into contact with the abject through his exploration, Berryman was paradoxically intrigued and repulsed by Christianity, continuously straying from it, only to return to embrace some aspect of it.[43]

The poet's first memorable encounter with Catholicism involved serving Mass, from the age of five, under the guidance of Father Boniface Beri. This priest, as Berryman would later write, "influenced me as a child only less than my father" (DH 15). However, as he recalls in his interview with Stitt, his conception of Christianity "went to

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[43]Robert Lowell describes Delusions in similar terms, stating that the prayers featured in the book are those of a "Roman Catholic unbeliever's, seesawing from sin to piety, from blasphemous affirmation to devoted anguish" ("For John" 72).

pieces at [his] father's death, when [he] was twelve" (41). As he would eventually explain in his notes to Recovery, Berryman began to perceive God as "a son of a bitch who had allowed Daddy to go mad with grief and fear" (RE 233). Although "a rapt Episcopalian" for several years while attending South Kent school in Connecticut (Stitt "Art" 41), Berryman's enthusiasm for Christianity was irrevocably tainted with feelings of disbelief and resentment. Upon entering Columbia College in 1932, he became increasingly sceptical, although he admittedly never lost "the sense of God in the two roles of creator and sustainer" (Stitt "Art" 41). His search intensified during his extensive exploration of theology and religious texts as a professor. He delighted in the prospect of teaching a course in which the New Testament and a collection of documents "illustrating the history of the Church, Augustine, Aquinas, [and] Dante" would play a central role (DH 283), and eloquently observed, in Recovery, that New Testament criticism "constituted his only hobby, excluding the arts and star-gazing, and [that] he read the bloody commentators with a sharp eye and desperate envy" (233).

Berryman's questions pertaining to Christian doctrine were numerous, his greatest struggle involving the problematic notion of a God of rescue. In his notes to Recovery, he admitted to accepting the existence of "God the Creator and Maintainer of the Universe," the Devil, and possibly even occasional intervention on the part of God, but boldly denounced the possibility of an involved entity: "What he did not buy was any regular attention to human affairs on the part of His Majesty. Screw that. Because look at them" (233). Despite subscribing to the belief that God "desires us to penetrate" into the mysteries of both ourselves and the universe, Berryman expressed frustration at the enigmatic entity, stating that God has "made both mysterious, & banned access to certain all-important key problems," including the technicalities of the Resurrection (233). Another predictable source of anxiety involved the issues of Hell and divine punishment. Berryman, troubled by the notion of eternal damnation, naturally "embrace[d] Origen's doctrine [of apocatastasis] with fervid delight" (CC 101).

From 1970 to 1971, Berryman's spiritual search developed into a religious frenzy. Although earnestly contemplating the possibility of converting to Judaism, he ultimately returned to the faith of his childhood, becoming a professed Catholic. As he explained to Peter Stitt,

> I lost my faith several years ago, but I came back--by force, by necessity, because of a rescue action--into the notion of a God who, at certain moments, definitely and personally intervenes in individual lives, one of which is mine. ("Art" 39)

A conception acquired from his studies of Augustine and Pascal, Berryman's belief in a God of rescue who "saves men from their situations, off and on during life's pilgrimage, and in the end," became integral to his faith. He insisted, when discussing the idea, that "I completely bought it, and that's been my position since" (Stitt "Art" 41). Nevertheless, considerable scepticism remains concerning the authenticity and permanency of Berryman's altered religious consciousness. As Douglas Dunn observes, Berryman "may have discovered faith, and its attendant certainties; but a nervous edge, an incompletion, was to remain" (150). His language in the religious poems in Love & Fame is, at times, Dunn argues, "mixed" and "quirky," even though the poems were presumably partially intended to reverse "the carnality, comedy and religious doubts" of The Dream Songs. Furthermore, his "new spiritual situation demanded penitence," which he was unable to muster, even with the "promise of glory" (150).

Berryman was, notably, particularly intrigued by the character of Christ. He described Jesus as "the most remarkable *man* who ever lived," despite expressing uncertainty as to whether he was "in any special sense the son of God" (Stitt "Art" 42). Although he was reluctant to completely embrace New Testament notions, claimed to never pray to Christ, and did not consider himself to be a Christian *per se*, Berryman

internalized the character of this historical figure.[44] During his religious crisis, as Mariani notes, he "experienced the disturbing sense that Christ was present in his room" ("Life" 397). Similarly, in one of his most famous statements, Berryman succinctly expressed his desire "to be nearly crucified," an attitude he recognized as "preposterous," yet crucial to his development as a poet. To be "knocked in the face and thrown flat, and given cancer, and all kinds of other things short of senile dementia" was, he declared, a stroke of immense luck, for to be "presented with the worst possible ordeal which will not actually kill" enabled an aspiring artist to achieve greatness (Stitt "Art" 44). Christ, in other words, came to represent, through his self-sacrifice, the epitomy of artistic achievement to Berryman.

"DO NOT DO, FATHER, ME DOWN"

Before exploring Henry's affinity with Christ, I believe that it is crucial to examine his inability to extricate his conception of his father from his view of God. The boundaries that distinguish the absent father, whose "mad drive wiped out" Henry's childhood (143), from the "hidden" God (217), whose works had "not taught" Henry "his love" (256), are frequently indistinguishable and contribute to Henry's "distorted" view, biblically speaking, of Christ. As the poet notes in Love & Fame, his "father's suicide when [he] was twelve/blew out [his] most bright candle faith" (85). Henry's father is first subtly connected to God in the epigraph to the Songs. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the statement, "Thou drewest near in the day," aligns Henry with Israel, for like the captive nation, he is, as a child, stripped of his male protector, and consequently loses his "statehood," or identity, when he acquires a new name through his stepfather, the adversary he fears "most in the world" (DS 168). Because of his father's departure, the

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[44]He did, however, consider himself to be a Catholic at the time of this interview.

"covenant doctrine," or the bond between father and son, is destroyed, leaving Henry to attempt to make sense of the bewildering upheaval of his emotional and spiritual security.

The impact of John Allyn Smith's suicide on Berryman cannot be overestimated. Although the poet's memories of his father can hardly be deemed accurate, being misconstrued by time, selective memory, and the influence of biased external sources, the departure constituted what the poet believed to be the single most critical event in his life. Despite the fact that his memories of his father and the immediate sensations he experienced following the death were sketchy, the poet became convinced, later in life, that he had suffered profusely from his loss. As Haffenden argues, he took Smith's death "as the *point d'appui*" of his psychological problems (Life 29), vacillating between an intense hatred of the man and compassion for him. The extent to which Berryman suffered as an adult from the loss of his father figure is evident in a poignant letter written to his mother in November of 1970, in which he addresses "a matter of unique & urgent importance," demanding that she clarify the details of the suicide. Despite being in his fifties at the time, Berryman refers to his father as "Daddy," and recalls a devastating moment in his childhood which he "tho't [he] recognized him on the street one day" (DH 376). John Allyn Smith became, one can argue, a figure of abjection, ceaselessly fascinating and tormenting his son and enticing him to follow his example by willfully crossing the boundaries that distinguish life from death.

The assumption that Henry's father reenacts the "crime" committed by God against his people in Lamentations and even becomes God, in a sense, is reinforced by the ambiguity inherent in Berryman's poetry, as well as the poet's use of symbols that create an interconnection between various individuals and themes. The second and third stanzas of Song 82 exhibit this complex strategy:

Herewith ill-wishes. From a cozy grave
rainbow I scornful laughings. Do not do,

Father, me down.
Let's shuck an obligation. O I have
done. Is the inner-coffin burning blue
or did Jehovah frown?

Jehovah. Period. Yahweh. Period. God.
It is marvellous that views so differay
(Father is a Jesuit)
can love so well each other. We was had.
Oh visit in my last tomb me. --Perche?
--Is a *nice* pit.

Henry's plea, "Do not do,/Father, me down," leaves the identity of the Father open to speculation. Placed among references to both "Yahweh" and "a Jesuit," the term "Father" evokes images of both God the Father and a priest. When associated with God, the awkward phrase, "From a cozy grave/rainbow I scornful laughings," implies that Henry, upon being annihilated along with his generation, is compelled to challenge the validity of the covenant between God and Noah as signified by the rainbow. Although humanity will never be exterminated by another flood, the maligned divine figure is resourceful enough to uncover other ways in which to torment and dismantle his creation. The ambiguous term, "Father," also evokes images of Henry's biological father, whose suicide was a "let-down" that caused the child to digress "down" from his position in the sycamore to a lowly existence marked by suffering.[45] The fact that Henry speaks from a "cozy grave" illustrates the interconnection between his fate and his father's end.[46]

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[45]This downward digression is evident in the first Dream Song in which Henry moves from the heights of the tree, to a more secretive existence. Whereas he once joyfully

The colour blue, evoked when Henry questions if the "inner-coffin" is "burning blue," is significantly used throughout The Dream Songs to connect Henry with his biological father, Christ, God, sin, and images of death. The colour appears in Song 243, for example, when Henry calls "to him for discomfort blue-black losses," like a "remaining man"--possibly a surviving soldier. In this Song, the present and immediate world is overshadowed by the larger universe: Henry is aware of a "hiss from distant space" and, fearing death, requests that the person whom he is addressing feel his pulse and respond to the question, "Is the hour to replace my face?". A similar juxtaposition of linear time and a state ungoverned by its limitations is evident in Song 70, in which a "[d]isengaged" and "bloody" Henry progresses from participation in an immediate, physical competition, to involvement in an otherworldly game of perpetual "winning and losing," competing in "the weird regattas of this afterworld." It is in this realm that Henry chooses to contend with his fiercest competitor--whom Haffenden identifies as John Allyn Smith--declaring that he will time "the blue father," an ironic statement considering the absence of time in his environment. The colour appears again in relation to Henry's worldly father in Song 11, when Henry evasively declares, "I'll dig him up," and props up what can either be identified as a photograph, or a corpse of his blue father. Blue is also used in relation to God and the sinner in Songs 194 and 104, for Henry discusses "Dr God," his painful therapeutic techniques, and the "blue sad darkies' moans" that result,

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sang, he eventually attempts to hide "the day," and resents being exposed.

[46]In this example, Henry, as Kristeva would observe, actually follows the abject--his father--to "its place of banishment" (PH 2). In Song 384, in contrast, Henry defies the abject without crossing the boundary from life to death, spitting upon his father's grave after having made, to the site, an awful "pilgrimage," a word with notable religious connotations.

respectively, from his divine practice, and the empty temples that are filled with "a decade of dark-blue/sins." Finally, the colour is associated with Christ, for in Song 200, Henry implores his family to exchange "blue-black kisses" in honour of him. Through the use of this somber colour and the mood it evokes, Berryman forces the reader to associate these various tragic figures with each other, as well as with the state of depression and physical marks of violence.

In Song 241, the boundaries that differentiate God from Henry's father are erased through a similar technique. Once again, Berryman refuses to allow his reader to uncover a single, coherent meaning within the poem, forcing, instead, the recognition of various plausible interpretations, whether specific and autobiographical, or historical and general. His use of ambiguity is evident in the first stanza:

> Father being the loneliest word in the one language
> and a word only, a fraction of suns & guns
> 'way 'way ago,
> on a hillside, under rain, maneuvers, once,
> at big dawn.

Because of Berryman's strategic placement of the word "Father," one cannot ascertain whether it should, in fact, be capitalized, or whether it is merely capitalized because of its position at the beginning of the line.[47] The word points, on one hand, to Henry's physical "Daddy" (DS 241), who, as Mancini observes, "killed himself with a 'fraction,' an

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[47]In Song 256, Berryman creates a similar ambiguity when he states, in reference to God's occupation, that "long experience of His works/ has not taught me his love./ His love must be a very strange thing indeed." The use of both capital and lowercase letters in the pronoun, "his," indicates that both Henry's biological and divine father have contributed to his spiritual bewilderment.

explosion of 'guns/'way 'way ago'" ("Couvade" 306), diminishing Henry into a mere "fraction of" a "sun," or son, and forcing him to only speak in the "one language" of bitterness and hatred (DS 241).[48] However, as Mancini argues, Henry also "sees his father . . . as a false savior or guard, an abortive Christ, who on the 'hillside' of Golgotha ' 'way 'way ago' missed the opportunities for resurrecting himself and his diminished son" (307). To extend Mancini's interpretation of the father as a Christ figure, the two characters in the poem who were on a hillside "'way 'way ago" can also be identified as God and Christ, with Henry assuming the role of the saviour. Like Christ, Henry hangs upon the cross, fighting "the strain/toward bottom," or the physical and psychological pull to the ground caused by his own weight, the burden of the sins of others, and his own desire to "Come down." Nevertheless, he is able to avert his gaze towards God, lifting "his head with an offering." The word "Father," in this case, becomes the loneliest word, for it is used "in the one language" Christ speaks in his final lament as he experiences complete, blinding isolation from his heavenly Father moments before his death.

Henry's father is also strategically aligned with God in his depiction as a predatory beast. Like God, the "careless monster," who, with his "touch of paranoia," resembles "something disturbed" (DS 317), Henry's father is described as being "tendoned like a grizzly" and "wide in the mind" (34). The theme of the bear, which appears in Lamentations, surfaces in Song 36, for after Henry concludes that "De choice is lost" and that death is inevitable, Mr. Bones envisions a strange, disconcerting, and climactic moment in which the "boy & the bear/looked at each other." Whereas the boy is

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[48]The poem has biographical roots: one of Berryman's memories of his father, who joined the Oklahoma National Guard in the 1920's, revolves around his visit to Fort Sill, where he watched men with field-glasses, "his father in puttees moving away to give orders," and the firing off of guns (CC 115).

indisputably Henry as a child, the bear cannot be easily identified, for, as Gustavsson observes, "the bear image acquires a rich connotation of meanings" as the poem progresses: the beast can be associated with "the suicide drive," the "threatening appearance that God takes on for the unbeliever" (85), and, I believe, the traumatic memory of Henry's deceased father that must be faced and overcome. Clearly, both fathers are perceived as threatening forces who possess the potential to wreak destruction in their unpredictable fits of violence.

Considering the brutal nature of the father, it is almost ludicrous to place the expectation upon Henry that he "re-cognize" or introject his parent. To honour his father and to submit to the "concrete, genetic, and social authority" upheld by Christ is synonymous with sacrificing himself to the abject and the demoniacal. The menace, once external, becomes a much more threatening destructive force once internalized, for Henry, upon incorporating his father's death drive, is compelled to reenact his suicide. Taking the similarities between his father and God into account, Henry is forced to probe into the significance of Christ's death. Assuming the character of this historical figure, Henry explores the question of whether Christ was, in fact, a "saviour," sacrificing himself for humanitarian reasons, or whether he felt compelled to die following the "re-cognition" and introjection of his maligned Father. Furthermore, the question is raised as to whether Christ was, in fact, the ideal son, or whether his death signified failure and an attempt to escape the menace within. Even the notion of Christ's perfection is open to dispute, for the God to whom he submits is fragmented and flawed.

"LET PASS FROM ME THIS CUP"

As if to explore these questions, and perhaps strive to become the ideal son, Henry adopts the character and duties of Christ. Both he and Christ, like their fathers, are linked through ambiguity and the juxtaposition of various otherwise self-contained images within Berryman's poetry. In Song 101, for example, an image in Henry's mind is

merged with the so-called "reality" of Christ. In this poem, Henry describes a dream in which he views a shallow lake with his mother, then wanders around the grounds of the lunatic asylum. After grappling with these images, Henry observes that he

> . . . can't go into the meaning of the dream
> except to say a sense of total LOSS
> afflicted [him] thereof:
> an absolute disappearance of continuity & love
> and children away at school, the weight of the cross,
> and everything is what it seems.

Although it appears that Henry is specifically associating his "LOSS" with this "extraordinary vivid dream," it is more likely that he is really describing, in the final stanza, a greater dream--the vision that underlies The Dream Songs. His lesser dream is notably filled with trivial details, which, however significant they may be in an unconscious state, cause the final stanza to appear melodramatic and absurd. The greater dream relates, one can argue, to an individual who not only fears that he has lost his sanity--evident in the images of the asylum--and his mother, who seems to disappear in the dream, but endures the ultimate loss of self, bearing "the weight of the cross." In this dreamlike state, Henry understands what it means to suffer as Christ did.

Similarly, in "The Old Poor," Henry describes God's numerous "surprises," referring, for example, to his mother's remarriage. Berryman then juxtaposes this biographical detail with a description of the incidents specifically experienced by Christ, including his betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion. After the tales of the two lives are interwoven and the two frames of time that they occupy are merged, Henry declares:

> I have a story to tell you which is the worst
> story to tell that ever once I heard.
> What thickens my tongue?
> and has me by the throat? I gasp accursed

even for the thought of uttering that word.

I pass to the next Song:

The reader is left to ponder whose experiences constitute the worst story and what word renders Henry speechless before he has even attempted to expel it. His fascination with mouths, stories, and the power of words, as well as their connections with physical wounds, is intriguing. An old friend's betrayal, for example, composed of "words out," not only leaves the individual "pale," but forms a "gash" in the victim. Words become a substantial, almost physical manifestation of the abject. Although Henry becomes, as a Christ figure, the "Word," he is simultaneously repulsed by language and unable to completely interiorize it or incorporate it into his being. He is, symbolically, "a half-closed book" (DS 159)--partially accessible, yet enigmatic.

Henry not only recognizes significant parallels between his life and Christ's, but directly aligns himself with the historical figure, acquiring his divine characteristics. His identification with Christ is likely rooted in his obsessive attempts to comprehend his father's indecipherable decision to abandon him. By becoming the Word and a poet, Henry seeks to challenge his silent father, as Christ did before him, perhaps even unraveling the mystery of his silence through language and, therefore, achieving reconciliation. His agenda is outlined in Song 159, in which he states, after viewing the "[e]xalted figures" which pass before his eyes, that there are,

. . . secrets, secrets, I may yet--

hidden in history & theology, hidden in rhyme--

come on to understand.

At some point in this process of discovery, Henry, "schlaft in his historical moode" and captivated by the stories of "Good Friday, and the end" (217), either loses his original identity, or overestimates his role as a poet, experiencing delusions of grandeur and envisioning himself as a saviour. Regardless of the rationale behind the process, Henry

moves from simply empathizing with the historical figure, to assuming Christ's role and form.

Like Christ, with his divided nature as both the Son of God and the Son of Man, Henry possesses a "divided soul" (317). Whether this division consists of an intermixture between the "good & the vile" (317), the bestial and the human, or the human and the divine, is open to dispute. What is obvious, however, is that Henry envisions himself as being distinct from other humans. He describes his destiny as "almost endless" (347), admits to being "900 years old" (365), or as "old as a hieroglyph" (362), and claims to be both "living & dead" (365). He walks as though "he were ashamed/of being in the body," and is "rooted in our past"--the "our" being ambiguous--while his future "shrink[s] slim" (247). He is composed of "heroic stuff," is likened to a warlock, perplexes the "bulging cosmos" (79), and prompts the entire universe to howl "'No'" when in a drunker stupor (209). Furthermore, he becomes a significant leader:

> to the foothills of the cult
>
> will come in silence this distinguished one
> essaying once again the lower slopes
> in triumph, keeping up our hopes,
> and head not for the highest we have done
> but enigmatic faces, unsurveyed,
> calm as a forest glade
>
> for him. (87)

Like Nietzsche's Zarathustra, who descends from the hill to the masses below, and Christ, who abandons his elevated position in order to serve humanity, Henry assumes the role of prophet and saviour in this Song, "essaying"--or writing--as though he is, in fact, the Word.

Henry's "divinity" is also evident in his speech, and is most striking in his imitation of Christ's declaration of his transcendent nature and connection to God. In the book of Exodus, God reveals the name by which He desires to be known in Israel, stating, "I AM WHO I AM" (3:14), a proclamation that, as Haffenden observes, "denotes the highest existence" (CC 96). In the gospel of John, Jesus, as the Word, is aligned with the Father, being both "with God" and "God" (Jn. 1:1). In John 8:58, he specifically declares, "before Abraham was born, I am!", emphasizing both the eternal aspect of his being and his unity with the Father. Furthermore, in the eighth to fifteenth chapters of the same book, Jesus begins seven self-descriptions with the phrase "I am," words that are, as Kenneth Barker notes, solemnly emphatic in the greek, echoing God's self-identification in Exodus.[49] Like his divine predecessor, Henry repeatedly makes an identical assertion in The Dream Songs.[50] In Song 320, for example, he cries "I am--," as he wakes "sweated & sordid" (320). His claim to divinity is also subtly embedded in Song 46, in which he comments, "I am, outside." Not only is the comma in the statement placed inappropriately in order to emphasize the words "I am," but the poem includes, however derogatorily, the word "Christ." Finally, in Song 85, "Op. posth. no. 8," Henry exclaims, once again, "I am,"

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[49]The verses include John 8:12; 9:5; 10:7,9; 10:11,14; 11:25; 14:6; and 15:1,5.

[50]As John Haffenden notes, the phrase "I am" can be viewed as a "major triad" in Songs 46, 85, 141, and 320. The term "triad," derived from Archbishop Carrington's According to Mark--one of Berryman's favourite books--is used to account for "a threefold repetition, at intervals in the narrative, of a word or phrase which draws attention to some theme of high significance" (CC 97). Although Berryman did not, as Haffenden observes, limit himself to repetition in groups of three, he used the "technique to bind some of the Songs (not in proximate clusters, but spaced widely about the work)" (97).

when describing his physical deterioration in a poem that can be seen to reflect, with a grim realism, Christ's thoughts as he awaits his death:

> Flak. An uneventful thought came to me,
> who squirm in my hole. How will the matter end?
> Who's king these nights?
> What happened to . . . day? Are ships abroad?
> I would like to but may not entertain a friend.
> Save me from ghastly frights,
>
> Triune! My wood or word seems to be rotting.
> I daresay I'm collapsing. Worms are at hand.
> No, all that froze,
> I mean the blood. 'O get up & go in'
> somewhere once I heard. Nowadays I doze.
> It's cold here.
>
> The cold is ultimating. The cold is cold.
> I am--I should be held together by--
> but I am breaking up
> and Henry now has come to a full stop--
> vanisht his vision, if there was, & fold
> him over himself quietly.

The fragments surrounding Henry's claim create a religious context, although the ambiguity within the poem does not exclude other interpretations. Like Christ during his crucifixion, Henry suffers intensely, longing to be redeemed from the "ghastly frights" and the worms which anticipate his end. In addition to fearing the forces that wait beyond death, Henry is horrified by his current physical condition. He observes, with alarm, that

his "wood or word seems to be rotting," the "wood" referring to the cross with its association with the power of redemption--which appears to dissipate in this example--and the "word," to both his body as a physical manifestation of "the Word" and his actual verbal power. To add to his torment, the echoes of those who taunt Christ, facetiously labeling him the King of the Jews, appear to resound in Henry's head, for he exhibits doubt as to who currently resides as king. As if to remind himself of his union with God and the Holy Spirit, Henry proclaims, "Triune!". Nevertheless, his identification with God eventually falters, for his despair and feelings of alienation from his Father are more pronounced than his recognition of his divine status. He states, in a moment of terrified doubt, "I am--I should be held together by--/but I am breaking up." As if reliving the final moments of Christ, Henry comes "to a full stop," loses "his vision," and folds "him over himself quietly."

Henry does not only imitate Christ's pronouncements of his divine nature, but boldly adopts the life and works of Jesus as his own. In addition to describing himself as "semi-mortal" (80), and being almost blasphemous in his repeated assertion of "I am," Henry refers to his life in terms commonly used to describe Jesus's ministry, is driven by a divine task that must be fulfilled, and is eventually crucified--whether literally or symbolically. Although the Passion sequence reenacted in The Dream Songs tends to overshadow his ministry, there are several instances in which Henry, despite his questionable habits concerning alcohol and women, resumes a "ministry" of his own. In Song 112, for example, he proclaims that he must "speak to [his] disciples," choosing specifically to use a word charged with religious associations. Henry's speech within this poem is marked by its unusual repetition, reflecting, I believe, Christ's speech--notably simplistic because of the incredulity of his followers and their inability to interpret

symbolic imagery.[51] To begin with, Henry pays lip service to God, repeating, twice in the same stanza, the phrase "God send it soon," in reference to the "end" to which he is coming. Furthermore, he repeatedly emphasizes his responsibility to honour his Lady's birthday. This woman can be likened to Mary, who wins the favour of Jesus by pouring perfume on his feet and wiping them with her hair, for Henry describes bringing his Lady "to the test," and honouring her "for her high black hair," and her "good soul," which, perhaps in reference to the miracles performed by Jesus, is "as true as a healed bone." Finally, Henry emphasizes his importance as a teacher and a speaking subject when he says, "I say," "I say to you," and "I say again," although he struggles, ironically, to define exactly what he "mean[s] to say" (112). Despite being the Word, he finds speaking difficult. Nevertheless, he elevates language, praising his Lady for the value of every word she utters.

Like Christ, Henry is convinced that he is obliged to fulfill a divine duty that exceeds the expectations placed upon a normal "human." Each character repeatedly predicts the inevitability of his violent end and voices his reluctance to act as a saviour. In the case of Jesus, who laments that his appointed "time is at hand" (Matt. 26:18), yet submits to the greater will, declaring that he "must work the works of him that sent me" (Jn. 9:4), Henry recognizes that "we must submit" (DS 153),[52] and that we "hafta die" because it "is our 'pointed task" (36). Reflecting the attitude of Christ, Henry momentarily accepts his destiny when he declares, "My framework is broken, I am

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[51]For example, in John 21:15-17, Jesus, in the process of reinstating Peter, asks him three times if he loves him, commanding him each time to feed his sheep. Elsewhere, he repeatedly predicts his death.

[52]As I will discuss later, Henry's recognition of the human obligation to submit to God in Song 153 is not followed by an acceptance of this position of subservience.

coming to an end,/God send it soon" (112), and even proclaims, in a moment of courage following a visitation by Delmore Schwartz in the form of a "Hebrew spectre" (146),

> "Down with them all!" . . .
> Their deaths were theirs. I wait on for my own,
> I dare say it won't be long. (146)

Furthermore, like Jesus who confesses, in the Garden of Gethsemane, that his "soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" (Matt. 26:38), pleading with his Father, "let this cup pass from me" (26:39), Henry's resolve wavers when he admits that his "desire for death was strong/but never strong enough" (259), and even boldly states, "Let pass from me this cup," despite realizing that it is his role to "save" (131).

Perhaps the most substantial evidence pointing to a methodical connection between Christ and Henry is seen in the reenactment of the events of the Passion throughout The Dream Songs. In Song 260, Henry endures the emotional separation from his loved ones that Jesus is forced to experience prior to the crucifixion--isolation being an important aspect of his martyrdom. As in the biblical example in which Christ is psychologically separated from his immediate family members who, upon failing to recognize the purpose behind his behaviour, question his sanity and attempt to "take charge of him" (Mk. 3:21), Henry, whose sanity is often questioned, is described as being isolated "in the midst of his family" and being "as solitary as his dog," descriptions appropriately combined with a discussion of his "project" (DS 260). The Song continues, after a description of the despair that rocks "lonely Henry," with the lines,

> In another world he'll have more to say of this,--
> Concepts came forward & were greeted with a kiss
> In the passionate fog.

This passage resounds with echoes from the unfolding Passion in which an angry crowd "came forward" to arrest Jesus following the kiss of Judas.[53] These experiences of betrayal and isolation are only a taste of the climactic horror of abandonment by the father figure that must follow, the very figure, ironically, whom both Christ and Henry strive to please.

The subject of the crucifixion is generally approached with respect in The Dream Songs, the fact that Henry is seriously affected by Christ's sacrificial death being indisputable. While celebrating Christmas in Song 200, for example, he does not contemplate or joyfully acknowledge the birth of Jesus, but insists that his family "exchange blue-black kisses"--perhaps in remembrance of Judas's kiss that led to excessive violence--for "the fate of the Man" who "hung, for you & me" on "the terrible tree." Refusing to allow the arrival of Jesus to take precedence over his departure, Henry suggests that decorating the Christmas tree is almost blasphemous and uses the harsh description, "clashing our tinsel," to describe the offensive nature of this festive activity. The tree symbolizes sacrifice and, from Henry's perspective, must not be desecrated by merriment and celebration. Henry even leaves the reader with the perplexing suggestion that "the Man" was "not born today," perhaps implying that Christ became a "man" only when he committed his selfless act, or reminding the reader that Jesus was born in the distant past as opposed to "today."

Each detail concerning Christ's crucifixion becomes integrated into Henry's own experience. To begin with, he consistently appears in a tree which, like the cross with its positive associations with accomplishment, self-sacrifice, and the gift of eternal life,

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[53]Song 168 features similar images: "men from far tribes armed in the dark" are said to attack, while the unnamed victim, whether Christ or Henry, suffers from "the sudden gash of an old friend's betrayal, and "the caress that felt for all the world like a blow."

frequently and concretely symbolizes Henry's artistic achievement and the ways in which others benefit from it. When he successfully puts "forth a book" in Song 75, for example, the masses surround the "flashing & bursting tree" and are momentarily freed from their despair. Even the tree itself is altered, for through the influence of "savage & thoughtful" Henry, it becomes "remarkable," inspiring even elderly men to reminisce, hoisting their "six-foot sons" upon their shoulders. The edenic tree in which Henry sings in the first Song is, in other words, momentarily restored.

In addition to experiencing the glory associated with the cross, Henry experiences the reality of it, suffering profusely from both physical pain and psychological humiliation. In Song 9, "horrible," foaming Henry is seen "in the high wood," a reference that points to the lofty cross because of those below who cry "'Come down, come down'."[54] These words are of particular significance in The Dream Songs, appearing consistently, like the phrase "I am," and coinciding with the words of ridicule spoken to Jesus as he hung on the cross.[55] Henry is consistently splayed on a symbolic crucifix. He slumps down after being "nailed as [a] scholar" in Song 184, bleeding black despite leaning on heaven, while in Song 153, he states, "I hang," during his commentary on God's career. In Song 359 he is said to be "nailed" to a "thing" (359), while in Song 380, he is described as "Punctured Henry." He is even unable, in Song 128, to have "three nails" removed from him following the dramatic events of "Good Friday."

Like Christ, Henry experiences three days in a deathlike trance. The fact that he spends three days in the tomb--psychologically, at least--is emphasized in both Song 49,

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[54]In Song 9, as J.M. Linebarger observes in John Berryman, Henry exhibits one of his "recurring delusions [that] he is under attack," and substitutes himself for the hounded criminal in the 1941 Humphrey Bogart-Ida Lupino movie, High Sierra.

[55]Matthew 27:40, Mark 15:30.

in which Henry is said to "sleep[ ] & sleep[ ] and sleep[ ], waking like death," as if from a "profound sleep," and in Song 153, in which he suffers for "a day, a day, a day" after hanging. The three days he spends apart from his body in a state of limbo are evident in several poems. Song 202 features the initial detachment from the earth and his body that Henry, after realizing that "this way is death," endures:

> blessed sweating waking heaves between
> this body lunging and the horrid scene
> alive back there below.

In Song 256, in turn, Henry mentions wanting to "rest here,/neither below nor above." He can be said to even visit hell in this brief interlude of time, as did Christ during the three days prior to his Resurrection, according to common Christian tradition. Hell is described, in the first stanza of Song 56, as being notably "empty," as if the harrowing of it "has come to pass," resulting in the "awe" that settles over the "whole grave space." As the second stanza--which can be interpreted as a flashback--emphasizes, Henry has died to redeem "us all" rather that merely "some," a truth evident in the vast, silent, unoccupied space in hell.

It is of little surprise, considering the intricacy of the parallels already drawn between Christ and Henry, that the Resurrection, the most critical, esteemed event of Christianity, is a topic grappled with in the Songs. The notion of resurrection is indirectly alluded to in numerous instances. For example, the statement, "empty grows every bed," in the first Song, may refer to the empty tomb, for not only is the image of the bed very general, but its placement among other ambiguous symbols, including the world, the tree, and the sea, is very telling. "Huffy Henry" can be described as a disillusioned adherent of Christ, for although he was once "in a sycamore,"--in which he could, like Zaccheus, view Jesus,--his faith has been dismantled by "a departure" and the maligned actions of those who "thought/they could *do* it," the "it" referring, perhaps, to the murder of his personal saviour. Although ultimately a sign of Christ's victory, the empty bed or tomb is

not interpreted as such by the childish, sulking Henry, for he is only aware of the absence of the figure in whom he once believed.

The Resurrection is also indirectly alluded to in Henry's lament for Delmore Schwartz, Berryman's beloved friend and fellow poet who died of a heart attack on July 11, 1966. In Songs 146 to 158, Henry envisions Delmore to be, like himself, a representation of Christ, and is willing to misconstrue the facts concerning the poet's death in order to strengthen the parallel. For example, although Schwartz's body, according to Eileen Simpson, "lay unclaimed for two days" after he was declared dead (245), Henry states that the poet's "good body lay unclaimed/three days" (DS 151), evoking images of the three days in which Christ's body lay unclaimed by God. Like one of the disciples, Henry sinks "to his knees," the "his," of course, being ambiguous, placing Henry in a position of supplication. As if in prayer, he recognizes that the man he idolized was "tortured, beyond what man might be" and that we must "all be Jews bereft, for he was one" who "died too soon," like "'An Ancient to Ancients'."[56] Furthermore, in this sequence of poems, Delmore is said to have a real "mission," however obscure: is defined by the fact that he is "alive with surplus love" (155); is placed strategically in a tree;[57] suffers the "horror" of a "lonely end" (152); cannot be found by his followers in Song 150, like Christ whose disciples were overwhelmed by confusion upon the discovery of the empty tomb; makes "sudden appearances" and "vanishings" (152), and is

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[56]It is crucial to note in this Song, that the pronoun "he," referring to Schwartz, is frequently capitalized unnecessarily, as if to elevate his name and express both the poet's humanity and divinity. This practice is also evident, as was discussed earlier, in Berryman's juxtaposition of the capitalized "Father" with the lowercase "father."

[57]In Song 147, "the poet," who can be identified as either Delmore or Henry, is envisioned singing "High in the summer branches."

described, following his death, as "the Hebrew spectre" (146). Clearly, a connection between Christ and the poet is being established, however subtly, in this series of poems.

Although the theme of the Resurrection receives attention in the Songs, Henry is never blatantly resurrected in the traditional sense. Despite the fact that he is elevated through his poetic achievements, rises "up shy in de world" (77), and "rises" sexually, he remains bound to the earth and to death. After pondering whether Thanksgiving turkeys wish to escape death through flight--a resurrection of sorts--Henry admits that he "should know," and that off "away somewhere once [he] knew/such things" (385). Nevertheless, although he may have once wished to escape death, Henry was, and still is, unable to reach this final stage of Christ's career and to be reunited with the father who abandoned him. Even if "every bed" grows "empty," as is claimed in the first Song, there is no celebration of Christ's supposed final achievement in The Dream Songs.

"A HOBBLE CLAPPED ON MERE HENRY"

To argue that Henry is merely an incarnation of Christ, sent to impart his message on a secular twentieth-century audience, is to oversimplify Henry's position as a saviour. Although Berryman laments, as Gustavvson observes, "the disastrous history of the 20th century characterized by war and secularization," as well as the "vacuum left by the loss of Christian faith" and its replacement with "totalitarian ideologies and a materialistic way of life" (78), he does not suggest that Christianity--in its traditional form--should be reestablished in order to fill the spiritual void, nor that Christ serves as an adequate sacrifice or solution. On the contrary, the poet boldly confronts New Testament logic, ridiculing its claims that an ideal father/son relationship and a saviour undefiled by sin can be produced under a symbolic order in which the semiotic is repressed. Furthermore, Berryman criticizes the biblical repression of sexuality and Christ's unjust distribution of mercy, and questions how powerful discourse can really be when the semiotic is

restrained. The patriarchal foundation upon which Christianity is founded is, in other words, unbalanced and must inevitably collapse.

To return to the issue of Henry's father and his alignment with God in The Dream Songs, I believe that the connection between the two is used to dispel the biblical myth of an ideal relationship between Father and Son. In the New Testament, God is presented as the ultimate, exemplary father figure. As the divine Father, he is said to "love[ ] the Son" (Jn. 5:20), giving "him authority to execute judgment" (5:27). In Matthew, the perfection of God's role in relation to human parental roles is emphasized by the observation that if evil people give good gifts to their children, the generosity exhibited by the "Father in heaven," who readily gives "good things to them that ask him" (7:11), must be far greater. To Berryman's reader, these biblical verses, and others, become astutely ironic. For example, the biblical claim that "neither knoweth any man the Father, save the son" (Matt. 11:27), is undermined by Henry's confession that he "cannot read that wretched mind, so strong/& so undone" (145). The biblical statement, for "as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself" (Jn. 5:26), is tragically reversed, for Henry's father "could not live/an instant longer" (DS 145), while his son is "full of the death of [his] love" (48). John 5:19, which states, "the Son can do nothing of himself but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise," is also wrought with irony. Throughout The Dream Songs, Henry passionately proclaims, "I have to live," yet is compelled to follow his father in the act of suicide, declaring, "In a modesty of death I join my father" (76). The poet himself eventually committed suicide in a morbid imitation of his father's example.

Henry is, I believe, destined to fail as a saviour because of "the suicide/in which [he] is an expert, deep & wide" (DS 136). It is impossible, Berryman maintains, for an individual to suffer abandonment by one's father without being psychologically shattered; to cope with a loss of this proportion without vacillating between rage and despair, hope and cynicism, and hatred and love; or to endure the silence of this male figure without

becoming linguistically fragmented or even physiologically wounded. Christ, as presented in the Bible, is, in other words, a sham, and, as the Word, is little more than a culmination of the lies used to cover up the irresponsibility and sheer cruelty of an absent Father. Although Henry would like to believe in a benevolent God, he cannot commit to a fraudulent monster, and is thus torn between becoming the ideal--albeit fictional--Christlike son and a man who will embrace the "Strange & new outlines" that "blur the old project" (379). Summoning his courage, and sensing that the end is near, he struggles to expel a "large work, which will appear,/and baffle everybody" (308).[58]

Idealized biblical notions of the Son, including a belief in his humble obedience and continuous allegiance to his Father, collapse as conceptions of the perfect Father disintegrate. Although Henry, as a realistic representation of Christ, generally embraces his duties as a saviour with a serious and adamant persistence, the negative aspects of his humanity frequently overshadow his obedient submission. The complete absence of sin during the biblical Christ's childhood and ministry is brought into question by the stark contrast between the two saviours. Henry, as a Messianic figure, is portrayed as a carnal character, who, unlike the young, obedient, fictional Jesus who wins favour with God and men,[59] is "wicked & away" even as a child (1). As an adult, he is so caught up in his sexual escapades and his preoccupation with "madness & booze" (225) that Mr. Bones is forced to observe that there "ought to be a law against Henry" (4). In an incredible act of blasphemy, Henry even exposes his father's corpse, tearing the "mouldering grave clothes" from the body and "heft[ing] the ax" to destroy the remains (384). Christ, in contrast, supposedly avoids sexual immorality and excessive drinking despite mingling

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[58]I will discuss Henry's linguistically baffling project in the following chapter.

[59]Although Christ broke religious boundaries, he is depicted--except, perhaps, in the Apochrypha--as reasonably benign and morally flawless.

with the dregs of society, and consistently exhibits respect for his Father. These serious discrepancies between the lives of these two individuals, who share so many commonalties and experiences, raise questions as to the validity of the biblical record.

Considering the ease with which the Christlike Henry is able, upon a whim, to "decidedly" "make up stories" that "light" his "past," and his "glorious present" (25), it is only logical to consider the possibility that Christ's flaws have been eradicated and his will and character molded to fit an agenda. In Song 25, Henry establishes the fact that his image can be violently altered and reconstucted, and his body manipulated to fit any form, whether being tightened into a ball, elongated, rendered sightless, purged of his "need," or reduced to one of the common masses. Accordingly, Henry also plays with a construct of Christ based on his own agenda. In Song 234, "The Carpenter's Son," for example, Henry imagines that Jesus had a propensity for insanity similar to that of his own, declaring that the child went "mad," and, in his madness, "saned the wisemen." By creating a Christ whose circumstances drive him to this mental state, Henry removes the impossible standard to which he feels he must measure up.

Henry is portrayed as a coward when faced with the prospect of death and even becomes, at times, a dismal moral failure. His humanity is more evident than that of the biblical Christ, who supposedly did not succumb to temptation and, despite fearing the prospect of death, accepted the obligation to sacrifice himself imposed upon him by God. Incidentally, Berryman questioned, as Mancini observes, whether Christ was human enough to trust, yet despaired that a "human" Christ would be incapable "of being an exemplar showing man the way to redemption, resurrection, and rebirth in the Divine" (BG 371). Henry is, of course, utterly human as far as a lack of courage is concerned, being, as Berryman describes him, "a hopeless coward with regard to his actual death" (Plotz 7). Although Berryman claims, perhaps ironically, that his character's cowardice "never comes out in the poem" (7), Henry obsesses over his inevitable end throughout The Dream Songs. He does, of course, toy with the notion of death as "a heady brilliance"

and "the ultimate gloire" (sic 123), and imagines, with pleasure, the recognition he will receive after being "lowered underground" (373). However, he also describes death as "fearful & intolerable" (185), experiences "panic dread" after mourning the dead (268), envisions "throngs of souls in hopeless pain" converging "upon a hopeless mote" (127), and imagines the bleak "final void" that he must enter, leaving his "power/& memory behind" (331).

As a failure and a coward, Henry is incapable of completing the divine task assigned to him.[60] In Song 55, after uttering the name of Christ, Henry confesses that he feels his "application failing," darkness coming, and "some other sound . . . overcoming."[61] Fully aware of Henry's limitations, the speaker declares, in Song 359, that

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[60]Although Henry manages to die, the process is difficult, and his actions are usually far from heroic. Preoccupied with his despair and self-doubt, he seldom recognizes those for whom he is dying. To emphasize Henry's despair as a sacrificial figure, Berryman alludes to the impossibility of suicide, although Henry explores the afterworld with seemingly little effort elsewhere.

[61]The poem's religious echoes are unmistakable. As Haffenden observes, Berryman described, in a filmed interview for BBC television in 1967, "the Song as being like the graveyard scene in *Ulysses*, where, prompted by the words, 'I am the resurrection and the light', Bloom utters his thoughts about an afterlife" (CC 99). Bloom himself is "averse to the notion of resurrection since the thought of physical corruption strikes him as too conclusive." However, despite opposing "the dogma of Christ's Resurrection," Henry is "wary of what he calls a 'coda of blaming'...[and therefore] feels immersed in an existentialist dilemma" (100).

. . . at last the effort to make him kill himself
has failed.

Take down the thing then to which he was nailed.

Although he tries the world "again & again," assuming a human form in his attempts to redeem humanity, Henry falls "short of the mark." A similar juxtaposition of Henry's failure and the crucifixion is evident in Song 184, a poem in which Henry is said to have failed "as a makar" and as a "father & a man," and more significantly, to have been "nailed as [a] scholar." Although the reference to his role as a reluctant Christ figure is particularly subtle in this example, it is supported by religious references in the third stanza, in which Henry is said to suffer "gross fears," to refuse to lean "on Heaven," and to bleed black. Finally, Henry describes himself, in Song 43, as "The Man Who Did Not Deliver," pleading, ironically, for his own "deliverance." Punning that he "must sting," Henry implores the reader to listen to the musical "grave ground-rhythm of a gone/ . . . makar?". The word "sting," despite its implication that Henry is compelled to "sing," also suggests that he must accept death's "sting," or inflict a deathly wound upon himself in order to become the gone "makar." The ambiguous "grave," in turn, reflects both the solemnity of the music and, when coupled with the suggestion that the "makar" is gone, evokes images of the empty tomb. The question is raised, however, as to whether the "makar" has, in fact, "gone" from the grave. Apathy quickly renders this question irrelevant, however, for the song ends in an emphatic, significant, and final, "So what."

Henry's efforts to be crucified are marked by their inadequacy, and the actual process, by its incompletion. In Song 160, Henry is described as being only "[h]alfway to death," while in Song 268, he is said to "nearly" die. He is "half-closed" as the Word (159), is marked by the wounds of "three nails," rather than four (128), and refers to a mere "semi-cross," rather than a cross (332). Furthermore, Henry cannot channel the energies and views of the conflicting characters within him long enough to focus on one

task. In Song 341, "Perishable Henry," who possesses a body that knows it must suffer, is simultaneously "Imperishable Henry," who ridicules death, humorously questioning, "will you have your death unsweetened [?]". Similarly, although he declares the soul to be "unreal," a more fearful part of Henry paradoxically affirms its existence, regarding it as "the terrible soul" (341). He is, ironically, both a cynic and a man of faith.

In Song 269, a connection is made between Henry's cowardice and the cruel nature of the expectations God places upon him. He is, in a sense, led blindly to his fate in this poem, realizing only in the end that he has been placed in a terrible predicament rather than in a position of honour. Embarking on a journey that he believes leads to "his friendly grave," Henry appears to be initially supported by acres "of spirits." Although, of course, his journey is, at one level, one that leads him into the oblivion of alcoholism, it is also possible that these "spirits" are also spiritual entities and possibly even the souls of the deceased individuals who hope to obtain salvation through Henry's death. The awkward image of Henry being "shook" suggests that they greet him with encouraging handshakes as he approaches his grave, or simply "shake" him up by their sheer numbers.

Henry's experience quickly becomes nightmarish, however, for he begins to vanish, while God, portrayed in the image of the "great sky" which grows gray to the point of never awakening, becomes oblivious to his plight. Initially, as if experiencing a sense of timelessness, elevated vision, and separation from the earth, Henry observes how the "visible universe grows older," and the "onflying stars" sail "out to [his] edges sail." As if imagining the aftermath of his successful crucifixion and his obedience to "some strange old laws," Henry remains briefly in a state of limbo, pausing to enjoy the "welcome distance of applauses." However, after this vision of the future, the poem concludes with an eerie and disjointed description of Henry's present reluctance to carry out his appointed task. Whereas he once enjoyed "praise," the hymns grow high and "weird," and, in "his final days," he is taunted by the "spits & shrieks" that his counterpart, Christ, endured. His love is declared to be "well beyond" him, and "the poor

man"--which could refer to either saviour--is advised to go "back into the tree" and to give "up spirits." The pun on "giving up spirits," incidentally, undermines the nobility of the crucifixion by equating the act of relinquishing the pleasures of inebriation with Christ's ultimate physical and spiritual sacrifice.[62]

The Father places his divine Son in a terrible predicament, an action that is confronted in Song 260:

> Tides of dreadful creation rocked lonely Henry
> isolated in the midst of his family
> as solitary as his dog.
> In another world he'll have more to say of this,--
> concepts came forward & were greeted with a kiss
> in the passionate fog.
>
> Lucid his project lay, beyond. Can he?
> Loose to the world lay unimaginable Henry,
> loose to the world,
> taut with his vision as it has to be,
> open & closed sings on his mystery
> furled & unfurled.
>
> Flags lift, strange chords lift to a climax. Henry
> is past. Returning from his travail, he
> can't think of what to say.

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[62]Berryman is, at the same time, exhibiting an intimate identification with the sacrifice Christ is forced to make, having experienced intense suffering as a recovering alcoholic.

The house's all about him, so is his family.

Tame doors swing upon his mystery

until another day.

In this ambiguous poem, Henry appears to briefly step out of his ordinary routine in order to assume the role of Christ, or, at the very least, a visionary. Like Christ, Henry experiences isolation despite being among family members,[63] has a "project" and a "vision," is distinguished from the carnal "world," and possesses a nature that is both mysterious and "unimaginable." He is, as an embodiment of unusual "concepts," "greeted with a kiss" in the fog of the passion, and is literally lifted, in a climactic conclusion, onto the cross before becoming part of the historical "past." At the beginning of the poem, the reader is introduced to Henry as he is rocked by tides "of dreadful creation." As if cast upon the sea--a symbol of destruction in the Songs[64]--he is left to drift into "another world," hazy and dreamlike with its "passionate fog." Aware of the validity of the task he must complete, Henry is nevertheless disgruntled by the expectations placed upon him: although he understands the nature of the lucid "project" that he must carry out "beyond" his present time and state, he questions whether he can accomplish it, fearing that it is "beyond" him; although he is "taut" with his vision, he is "loose to the world"; and although his mysterious purpose is "open" and "unfurled," it is also "closed," or "furled," and Henry himself unimaginable. As if planning to question his maker upon his death, he declares that "he'll have more to say of this" upon entering the next world (260).

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[63]Christ states, in Mark 6:4, that a "prophet" is "without honour" among "his own kin, and in his own house."

[64]Christ is associated with an unruly body of water in the New Testament. In Matthew 8:23-27, Christ is stirred from his sleep during a storm that threatens to capsize the boat that he and his disciples are on.

Rather than placing his will beneath the will of his Father, Henry verbalizes his resentment, refusing to negate or diminish the validity of his anger by assuming that his wishes are inferior to God's. To begin with, he expresses indignation at God's treatment of his body. In Song 113 he boldly states that there is "a hobble/clapped on mere Henry by the most high GOD," placed there, ironically, for "the freedom of Henry's soul." As if to ensure that Henry will become a heterogeneous being, in Kristeva's sense of the word, the punitive "god"--a word notably printed in lowercase letters--states that the body is "foul," and must be "bound." Despite successfully hiding his body for "many years," Henry is forced to eventually give it up, although he questions how it will benefit God "in the vacant sp*iritual* of space" (113), the italicized "ritual" referring, in all likelihood, to communion.

In addition to making an effort to "defy" God and "re-arrange" common notions concerning Christ (DS 314), Henry challenges the expectations placed upon Christians. One of Henry's main objections to New Testament logic involves the biblical expectation that humans "aspire to Christic sublimation" and reject, through confession, "the part of themselves that rebels against divine judgment" (PH 120), conforming to an ideal rather than embracing their multiplicity. Sin, which separates the body from the spirit, is viewed as negative and must be remitted. Although Henry longs to exist in a state in which opposites are reconciled, the heterogeneity of Christ--consisting of an "osmotic" relationship between the spiritual and the substantial (PH 120)--does not entail a recognition of the drives of the body. Therefore, the "sinful" state, in which fragmentation is evident, is comparatively positive to a Christlike heterogeneity.

As a rewritten Christ, Henry is, clearly, both a sublime and bestial being, perhaps in reflection of his divine father. His corporeality is, in a religious sense, neither "elevated, spiritualized, [nor] sublimated" (PH 120), as in the case of the historical figure, but remains associated with its primary functions. As a result, there is, throughout The Dream Songs, a juxtaposition of the "sacred" with the "profane" that is particularly

evident in the sexual innuendo surrounding the figure of Christ and religious practices.[65] When struck by the world's "glories," for example, Henry engages in sexual behaviour that is inappropriate for a saviour. Rather than his wounds receiving recognition in Song 26, Henry's loins become the "scene of stupendous achievement." As a spiritual leader, he requires servitude in the form of sexual acts, blasphemously proclaiming, "Knees, dear. Pray," to a female adherent. The statement that Henry fell back "into the original crime" is also laced with sexual connotations, for although he falls into art and rhyme, the terms "falling" and "original crime" are suggestive: in a poem featuring sex and suicide, Berryman humorously describes being crazy "with the need to fall on" a woman (BS 7); sexual intercourse, in turn, has been traditionally associated with original sin. Even Christ's death obtains sexual significance in the Songs. In the concluding stanza of Song 26, his final lament on the cross of "my God, my God," is followed with the remark, "I had a most marvellous piece of luck. I died." Christ's victory is, in other words, equated with sexual orgasm.

Although frequently morally and spiritually impotent, Henry, as Christ, is consistently sexually virile. It is his bestial character that is formidable and only a certain part of his corporeal being that is "elevated"--literally speaking, of course. Christ and Henry each appear, I believe, as a defeated figure in the final stanza of Song 21:

> In a madhouse heard I an ancient man
> tube-fed who had not said for fifteen years
> (they said) one canny word,
> senile forever, who a heart might pierce,

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[65]The terms "sacred" and "profane" are used in my discussion of Henry's sexual practices to reflects upon the traditional, patriarchal view of human sexuality, a perspective established and governed by the symbolic.

mutter 'O come on down. O come on down.'

Clear whom *he* meant.

The "ancient man" refers, on one hand, to Christ with his pierced "heart," or side, and his potential to "pierce" the human heart. He is notably stripped of his identity as the Word and, upon breaking his silence, echoes the very words spoken by those who ridiculed him at the foot of the cross. One cannot determine, of course, whether the ancient man took their advice and is speaking, as a living failure, in regret, or, having disregarded these words, regrets remaining on the cross, having reaped few palpable results. His resurrection--if he did, in fact, succeed in dying--is marked by its dismal and anti-climactic nature, for he is senile rather than glorious and must be tube-fed instead of being devoured through Communion. On the other hand, the "ancient man" may refer to an aging Henry in rehabilitation, for he is observed by a speaker--perhaps another aspect of himself--who uses the first person. A poetic failure, he has not uttered one "canny," or prudent, word, although he has within him the potential to pierce hearts. In both cases, the phrase, "O come on down," carries with it a sexual connotation, causing the senile man to be almost as repulsive as pitiful. The potency of both Christ and Henry is reduced to such an extent that it merely surfaces in the unwanted activity of a rather persistent member.

Clearly, when restrained by the symbolic order, the male sex drive becomes a destructive force. Although Christ's message encourages a reconciliation with paganism--pagan religions viewing the sexual act as sacred--New Testament logic nevertheless rigorously controls the sexual appetite, ensuring that an overwhelming release of drives does not take place. The biblical Christ is, accordingly, supposedly undefiled by sexual "sin." In Henry's case, however, his sexual energies, suppressed by "the symbolic," are manifested as misogynistic violence merged with religious delusion. In Song 131, Henry is presented as an "insane" and "disordered" saviour whose distorted views of women and his role as a male infiltrate his religious agenda. In a "waking

dream," Henry implores his lover to touch him, makes the patronizing assumption that Hegel will "hurt" her mind, and states that although he cannot remember the time when this woman behaved unkindly, he will set her "on fire/along with [their] babies." After planning this brutal crime, Henry ironically envisions himself as the saviour of the "growing daughters" he has threatened, proclaiming, "I must save them."[66] Even "the cup" from which he, like Christ, must drink, becomes associated with the feminine when Henry insists, "I swear I'll love her always, like a drink/Let pass from me this cup." As if refusing to introject the feminine, or the semiotic through drink, Henry attempts, instead, to continue upholding the symbolic, patriarchal tradition which establishes the male as authoritative, intellectually superior, and protective. His "heroic" actions are absurd, of course, for it is the domination of the symbolic that has placed women in the predicament from which they must be rescued. Redemption cannot occur without a release of the semiotic.

The issue of Henry's bestiality is raised again in The Dream Songs when Henry questions God's supposed control over historical circumstances and criticizes any involvement in human affairs that the divine figure may, in fact, have. In Song 361, Henry declares that history is "a matter of fumbles" that are misconstrued when recorded and that fortune is almost arbitrarily assigned, for "the prizes/come at the wrong times to the proper people/& vice versa" (361). When God intervenes, the results are, perhaps, just as ineffective, for his complex" task involves sorting "out from monsters saints" and rewarding them (174). The bestial and the divine are, in fact, incorporated into the human being, and cannot be extricated, as is evident in the poet's failure to separate the words "monsters" and "saints" with a comma in this poem. A "heterogeneous" body--in

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[66]His "babies" are, significantly, female, as are the other victims described in the previous chapter.

the negative sense of the word--who does not always recognize his actions as sinful. Henry observes his absolute solitude with terror, for he is left alone "among the animals" despite his capacity to rationalize. God, in turn, feverishly "sorts out the bloody saints," or martyrs, failing to take Henry's virtues and attempts at martyrdom into account (174).

While Henry, who openly acknowledges his bestial attributes, is dismissed as an animal, others, upon engaging in carnal acts, receive a deluge of forgiveness. Sin, in other words, evokes, rather unjustly, a positive response when "turned upside down into love" (PH 123). In Song 237, Berryman addresses the injustice of the absolution of a Christian's sins, and the fact that the more one is forgiven, the greater the overflow of love. One must note, of course, that this critique of Christian principles is balanced by the fact that those attempting to enforce moral standards are, despite the validity of their rage, reprehensible and merciless figures. The result is a disturbing poem in which religion and sexuality, justice, hypocrisy, and unwarranted cruelty, are juxtaposed:

> When in the flashlights' flare the adultering pair
> sat up with horror under the crab-apple tree
> (soon to be hacked away for souvenirs)
> and with their breasts & brains waited, & with ears
> while masked & sheeted figures silently–
> 'Kneel, I-love,' he stammered, 'and pray,' Henry was there.
>
> When four shots snapped, one for the Reverend,
> her sick howl, three for her, in the heads, all fatal, and
> when her throat is slit so deep the backbone eddies,
> her worshipful foolish letters strewn between the bodies,
> her tongue & voice-box out, his calling card
> tipped up by his left heel, Henry was toward.

When to the smokeless mild celestial air
they came reproved & forgiven, her soul hurrying after his,
when bright with wisdom of the risen Lord
enthroned, they swam toward where what may be IS
and with the rest Mrs Mills, larynx & tongue restored,
choiring Te Deum, Henry was not there.[67]

Although there is clearly more than one murderer, as is evident in the flare of the flashlights, Henry appears to be the sole avenger whose fantasies are intermingled with actual historical details. I believe that Henry acts, in this case, as Christ really would have, had his love been rejected for that of another religious leader. It is significant that the offending lovers commit their sexual act beneath a tree, and that the tree, a symbol of sacrifice and artistic sublimation throughout The Dream Songs, is subsequently hacked to pieces and commercialized. Furthermore, unlike Henry's "Lady," who is honoured for her "every word" (DS 112), Mrs. Mills has the audacity to bestow her "worshipful" letters upon another. As a consequence, Henry echoes his command for a woman to fall to her knees and "pray"--or perhaps engage in the act of oral sex, as in Song 26--becoming the antithesis of Christ in his tyrannical demand that the sinful woman in Song 237 pray for mercy before receiving several bullets in the head.

Although the Christ's treatment of the woman caught in adultery would appear more humane, his mercy is portrayed as absurd in Song 237. In the final stanza, the lovers are immediately forgiven, although they ironically still exhibit traces of their former desire, the soul of Mrs. Mills continuing to pursue the soul of the Reverend

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[67]The majority of the details of the first two stanzas of this poem are, as Linebarger observes, based on the murders of Reverend Edward Wheeler Hall, and his lover, Mrs. Eleanor Mills, in New Jersey on September 17, 1922 (159).

Nevertheless, in his infinite "wisdom," the "risen Lord" restores the tongue and larynx of the woman, undoing Henry's actions on the earth below. The biblical Christ and his more authentic counterpart, Henry, become, at this point, a split personality, in a sense. The ideal and the realistic representations of him are divided, one becoming a risen and naive saviour, and the other, an excessively punitive figure who continues to walk the earth.

The potency of discourse and the power allotted to Christ as the Word are also challenged. As I have discussed at various points in this chapter, Henry, when assuming the form of Christ, is often literally unable to speak and, upon producing words, is incapable of transforming his thoughts into coherent speech. Furthermore, he suffers from a violent somatic response when he attempts to interiorize the Word through communion.[68] Henry's direct encounter with Christ as he utters his final cry on the cross leads, inevitably, to confusion and verbal chaos:

> He yelled at me in Greek,
> my God!--It's not his language
> and I'm no good at--his is Aramaic,
> was--I am a monoglot of English
> (American version) and, say pieces from
> a baker's dozen others: where's the bread?
> (48)

Understanding only American English, Henry is, as Mancini notes, faced with a great barrier in his attempts to "pierce what seems only a wall of words containing nothing of substance" (BG 378). Christ, in turn, is forced to speak in a language foreign to him, an absurdity that evokes a response of shock in Henry, as is evident in his words, "my God!".

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[68]In Song 48, although Henry "*wants* to have eaten" Christ, the host, he "can't," for his attempts to incorporate the abject results in tremors, heaving, and dizziness (49).

Separated by linguistic and cultural barriers, and recognizing that Christ's words are not, in fact, his own, Henry describes the Eucharist as "the whole implausible necessary thing," drops his voice, and concludes that he must "get going." However, his ultimate problem is "not that he is 'a monoglot of English,' but that he is 'a monoglot' of himself, unwilling to speak the polyglot of voices within him" (379). Clearly, both he and Christ are verbally restricted under the symbolic order.

It is obvious, in The Dream Songs, that the Christ who succeeded in redeeming humanity despite the restrictions imposed on him by the symbolic, is nothing more than a fictitious character. Likewise, God, the head of the patriarchal system, is neither omniscient, omnipotent, nor infallible, in spite of the biblical depiction of him as such. Nevertheless, although frequently bleak, the Songs do not completely quell hope, but lead the reader to begin to envision a world in which balance between the masculine and the feminine, the corporeal and the spiritual, and paternal and maternal forces are restored, and the child's edenic world resurrected.

CHAPTER III: "WHERE THE SOUL NOT TALKS BUT SINGS"

In Revolution in Poetic Language, Kristeva explores the workings of "poetic language" as a "signifying practice"--a "semiotic system generated by a speaking subject within a social, historical field" (Roudiez 1). For Kristeva, "poetic language" is, as Leon Roudiez argues, something which "stands for the infinite possibilities of language," all other language acts being mere "partial realizations" of its inherent potential (2). The signifying process is composed of "the semiotic" and "the symbolic," two modalities that operate "within, by means of, and through language" (4). These components form a dialectical opposition, one "that has its source in infancy," is "implicated in sexual differentiation" (4), and allows for various modes of articulation, depending upon which of the two modalities dominates and to what degree.

The "semiotic" consists of the pre-Oedipal, "*primary processes* which displace and condense both energies and their inscription" (RP 25). Energies which exist within the subject's body are arranged, as he develops, by systems of constraint, including the family and other social structures. These drives, which consist of both "'energy' charges" and "'psychical marks'," compose a "chora," or a "nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated (25). Linking the chora to the maternal body, Kristeva associates "the semiotic," and therefore the mother, with "rupture, with 'vocal or kinetic rhythm,' with excess, with the preverbal" (Ty 225), and with dreams. "The symbolic," in contrast, is associated with "order, identity, consciousness, and the Name of the Father" (225), and occurs when the Father interrupts and breaks the cohesive mother-child dyad. Both the semiotic and the symbolic exist within the speaking subject, who is always composed of--and indebted to--each component.

It is important to examine, at this point, the title of Berryman's major work and the relation of the terms "dream" and "song" to the semiotic and the symbolic, respectively.

Hudgins, when referring to the duality and dialectic evident in The Dream Songs, argues that the phrase "dream song" unites

> in a felicitiously uneasy marriage two terms normally antithetical. A dream is the seemingly unorganized welling up of the unconscious and perhaps of unconscious truth. Song, on the other hand, is the organized, rational product of a human mind, the art of a "maker" who produces, if you will, conscious truth. (94)

One could argue, using Hudgins's logic, that Berryman places the semiotic, or the realm of dreams, and the symbolic, or the conscious act of song writing, in an "uneasy" opposition to each other in the title.[69] Like two of Henry's paradoxical selves, these modalities exist in a strained relationship involving the cyclical domination of one over the other throughout the poems. Reason and order continuously collide with the fantastical and incongruous.

However, despite the major role that paradox and conflict play in The Dream Songs, one cannot ignore Henry's vision of an ideal "middle ground" and the possibility that the title points not only to the fractious nature of the Songs, but also to the ultimate reconciliation between the conscious and the unconscious, the semiotic and the symbolic, and dreams and songs that Berryman envisions. In other words, I believe that the poet deliberately violates boundaries, plays with the theme of disintegration, and contradicts himself in order to loosen the grip of any force or view that threatens to dominate. Both patriarchal and maternal forces are appropriately targeted and are, at times, even victimized. Although Henry states that women "is better, braver" (15), for example, he simultaneously objectifies and patronizes the female sex. When faced with the maternal

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[69]As I have previously mentioned, Berryman combines two antithetical terms in the creation of the name of the main character of Recovery, joining the name "Alan," connoting harmony, with "Severance," suggesting disruption.

figure, Henry attempts to escape her "almost unbearable smother," while being, nevertheless, attracted to her nurturing qualities, running, ironically, "from home/toward home" (166). In a similar manner, Henry perceives the father as both "strong & undone," resenting how he rendered the mother frozen and "helpless" through his acts of violence (145), yet longing to forgive him. His paradoxical feelings toward this male figure are particularly evident in Song 143, in which Henry states, "I put him down/while all the same on forty years I love him." The need for resolution between the semiotic and the symbolic is obvious, for the domination of either is detrimental to Henry's well-being.

Although the terms "dream" and "song" are antithetical in Henry's corrupt and conflicting world, the possibility of a new type of "dream," and an unconventional "song," is revealed. The title, The Dream Songs, reflects not only the tension inherent in the work, but the work's potential: its ability to lead the reader to the edge of a place where the respective realms of dreams and songs merge--a middle ground. In various occasions in the Songs, "reality" pervades dreams, while the realm of dreams infiltrates consciousness, creating states that can be likened to lucid--or conscious--dreaming, and daydreaming, a lapse, during consciousness, in to the ruptured world of fantasy, respectively. Henry's dreams, for example, tend to be abnormally "real": in Song 131, he describes a "waking dream"; in Song 101 he relates an "extraordinary vivid dream"; and in Song 130, Henry cannot stop envisioning his friend being covered in blood, despite recognizing that the violence has occurred in a dream. Songs, in turn, cannot be associated exclusively with rationality or order in The Dream Songs. On the contrary, as Henry explains, "these Songs are not meant to be understood," but, like dreams, are meant to "terrify & comfort." Even when conscious, Henry lapses in to an unconscious semiotic realm:

> During those years he met his seminars,
> went & lectured & read, talked with human beings,
> paid insurance & taxes;

but his mind was not on it. His mind was elsewheres

in an area where the soul not talks but sings

& where foes are attacked with axes. (352)

Henry's encounter with the abject and the semiotic in the latter two examples enables him to briefly return, in a sense, to his former edenic state--singing at the top of a sycamore--as recorded in the first Song. However, because his experience inevitably evokes a response of fear in addition to desire, it is obvious that to simply unleash the semiotic will not rectify the damage caused by the domination of the symbolic, but will create a new imbalance. Although the distinction between dreams and songs is erased in these examples, I do not believe that the semiotic and the symbolic merge in the ideal sense, nor that a "middle ground" is created. Henry still notably clamours, in Song 385, for that which lies between "things and the soul," a state that dreams and songs can only point to, or reveal glimpses of.

"JUST BEYOND, & JUST IN SIGHT"

In her chapter entitled "In the Beginning and Without End" in Powers of Horror, Kristeva discusses the way in which Louis-Ferdinand Céline attempts to make language "fly off its handle" (189). Céline engages in a struggle with the mother tongue that can be identified as both loving and full of hatred, appearing to move both with and against it, and even "further, through, beneath, or beyond" it (188). By loosening "the language from itself," Céline probes a "hidden inside, a buried authenticity" where the "unnamable truth of emotion lies;" a void where "the rhythm of a music or the gestures of a dance are being woven" (189). Céline's style can also be defined, Kristeva argues, as "worship of the depths, as resurrection of the emotional, maternal abyss, brought up flush with language" (189), and must therefore be associated with revelation as opposed to creation. In his quest to "resensitize" language and to enable it to "throb more than reason," Céline

attempts to uncover the exact point where emotion transforms into sound. In this transformation, however, he is led to the void:

> Ultimately, at the end of the journey, there stands revealed the complete trajectory of the mutation of language into style under the impulse of an unnameable otherness, which, passional to begin with, then acquires rhythm before becoming empty. (191)

Melody alone reveals this buried authenticity.

Numerous factors contribute to the process of reaching the "ultimate unveiling of the signifier." Vulgarity and sexuality, for example, play a minor role, for despite being relatively insignificant, they act as "stepping stones" on the journey to this void (190). The use of slang, in turn, is important in the process of transforming emotion into sound. Because of its strangeness, slang acts as a "radical instrument of separation, of rejection, and, at the limit, of hatred," producing a "semantic fuzziness" that approaches the emptiness of meaning that Cëline strives to reach (191). The transformation of syntax is also critical and entails, in Cëline's case, sentence segmentation--"cutting up the syntactic unit and displacing one of its constituents" by either postponing or preposing it--and "syntactic ellipsis," the creation of a "staccato rhythm" through syntactical and logical ellipses. By treating language with violence, Cëline causes an affect to burst out "in sound and outcry." This affect borders on both abjection and fascination; bordering, in other words, on the brink of "the unnamable" (204).

Through Henry, Berryman engages in a similar process of loosening language from itself, revealing that which is concealed and using rhythm to both challenge and move beyond the abject.[70] Henry's use of language is frequently violent, strange, and

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[70]Through the semiotic, Henry is, momentarily, able to achieve a sense of freedom, or an escape from the "walls around [him]" (RE 232), and to diminish the power and urgency

vulgar, but occasionally leads, I believe, to the borders of the unnamable. When examining Henry's style of communication and its development, it is important to note that Berryman refuses to abide by any traditional, cohesive structural notions. Henry, in other words, does not simply progress, as a speaking subject, from obstinately refusing to engage in any form of communication other than body language, to using a speech riddled by slang and animal noises; then from an "appropriate," civilized mode of speaking, to the use of an elevated song and rhythm, and finally, to a climactic, uninhibited form of communication that reveals the unnamable. Rather than following a predictable pattern, Henry moves in a series of stops and starts, striving to push himself forward linguistically, only to return to his former primitive patterns of speech; breaking boundaries, yet never quite creating, in its entirety, a new language. Although there are moments in which Henry comes into contact with a potent and extreme form of language, "tasting," in other words, "all the secret bits of life" (DS 74), his adamant desire for a middle ground prevents him from stepping completely into this foreign linguistic realm.

Henry's reluctance to release his grip of the symbolic and to allow his familiar linguistic world to completely disintegrate can be likened, I believe, to his resistance against the forces that seek to blind him. Of course, the use of the term "blinded" reflects Henry's biased interpretation of a process that, one can argue, actually gives sight. Being rendered sightless is, to Henry, a terrifying prospect, for it will inevitably force him to alter the way in which he perceives reality and to develop new methods through which to apprehend his environment. Those who operate on him in Song 8 are therefore portrayed as torturers, although they may, in actuality, be attempting to redeem their patient when

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of the abject forces that threaten him. After facing the semiotic chora--evident in the form of the bear--in Song 120, for example, Henry totters to the "lip of the cliff," stumbling from the fearful beast to the edge of the void.

they weaken "all his eyes." It is crucial to note, in this example, that Henry has numerous eyes. He can be said to be, ironically, more "blind" than those with fewer eyes, for his reliance upon these sensory organs prevents him from using other, more acute, instruments of insight.

In order to acquire "true" insight and to move beyond the borders that separate him from the abject, Henry must be physically and metaphorically blinded, or stripped of the religious, social, moral, and cultural perspectives that taint his vision. The removal of this limited sight is frequently celebrated in the Songs. In Song 46, for example, it is only when the shopkeepers are stripped of their eyeglasses that they are able to see: in the process of being "blinded," they are given the accurate vision.[71] Similarly, as I discussed in "A Wrestle of Undoing," it is the blind bats with their "personal radar" in Song 63 that possess superior vision, and the monsters with fewer eyes that reign in Song 368. In Henry's case, however, being blinded is a gradual and often difficult process. Fear is said to "confound," then "loosen" his vision in Song 12, which "widens" Henry, enabling him to grow more receptive to a new form of sight. After being appalled by death in Song 21, Henry begins to really "see," for his "radar digs," enabling him to recognize that physical eyes can be used only in life, for those of the individuals who have ventured beyond are "shut." Eventually, Henry is able to differentiate between authentic sight and false sight, or "blindness"--in the negative and more common sense of the word. In Song 22, he associates the eyes that are "screwed to [his] set" with blindness, while he associates eyes that are capable of experiencing "feelings" and engaging in flight with sight in Song 24. Shortly after Mr. Bones's request that Henry be rendered "sightless," or rapidly stripped of

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[71]Incidentally, the shopkeepers' vision was initially adversely "affected" by the name of Christ and distorted by the Christian worldview imposed upon them through the glasses they felt compelled to immediately purchase (46).

his "crampon focus" (25), Henry is able to face the abject--the "heavy" thing that sits down on his heart--with "blind" and "open eyes" (29). And, at the end of 77 Dream Songs, he is said to "move on" and progress with "ancient fires for eyes" (77).

In the way in which he is blinded, Henry is deafened throughout the Songs. Once again, the term "deafened" contains a negative connotation from Henry's perspective and is associated with violence because of his resistance to the process. Although losing his limited sense of hearing enables him to acquire a more acute ability to recognize authentic sounds, his new aesthetic sense and growing ability to "hear" the unknown, or the abject, is painful. In Song 38, after observing,

> Maybe the source of noble such may come
> clearer to dazzled Henry. It may come.
> I'd say it will come with pain,
> in mystery,

Mr. Bones declares that he would rather "leave it alone," and significantly adds, as he resists the sound of the abject, "And down with the listener" (38). Similarly, in Song 207. Henry declares that "Music comes painful as a happy look/to a system nearing an end," noting that everything would break down if it were not for his will. Throughout the Songs, Henry, only half-deafened, literally nurses a wounded ear. In Song 81, the pain in his left ear is accompanied by a partial awareness of the realm from which the abject beckons: although he laments that he will be eventually stripped of his hands, feet, and eyes, he recognizes that this loss "is death" and that it is futile to attempt to avoid it. especially since it only entails the loss of the body. In Song 128, the process of deafening continues, for his "dim & bloody ear,/or ears" begin hemorrhaging. During this breakdown, Henry appears, ironically, to obtain a new awareness of the potential of ears, stating that they are capable of hearing "more than they should" or once "did."

Henry gradually acquires a new sense of hearing and, with this often remarkable capability, new aesthetic awareness. In Song 42, Henry identifies with the dead, insane.

"deaf" journeyer and his "blind song," stating that he is his "first son" and is "skilled," or able to "see" and "hear."[72] The fact that he doubts himself, stating, "I hear. I think I hear," suggests that Henry recognizes that another sense exists that has the potential to surpass the ordinary means of hearing. In Song 29, in turn, when faced with the heavy "thing" on his heart, or the abject, he not only sees with blind eyes, but appears to be capable of detecting odours with his ears. In Song 166, his search for new ears to replace his old dull ones leads him to the "grand shore," where he discovers his art. Despite Henry's development, however, he inevitably returns to his fantasy of a "middle zone," craving a place where one can "listen[ ] & not" (287).

Henry is also both resistant to, and fascinated by the possibility of transforming language into sound and music, and discovering what lies beyond the abject. In the way in which he fears being blinded and deafened, or forced to progress to a new level of sight and hearing, respectively, he experiences discomfort and even terror in the recognition of his potential to communicate and uncover the "secrets hidden . . . in rhyme" (DS 159). Henry is introduced, in the first Song, as a sulking, unappeasable child who is only capable of communicating, ironically, through his refusal to speak. His silent communication is transformed, in this Song, into the verbal through what appears to be the voice of his adult counterpart. Defying the restrictions of linear time, the speaker retrospectively observes that the childish Henry "should have come out and talked," yet continues to speak for him in the present, informing the reader of what "he has now to say," as if the child still exists. The adult Henry, from another perspective, still resists directly expressing his current emotions. Although he is able to use the pronoun, "I," when addressing the past,--"Once in a sycamore I was glad . . . and I sang"--he resorts to

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[72]As Linebarger observes, the "journeyer" may be Henry's father (117).

the use of the third person in order to express his current predicament--"What he has now to say is a long/wonder the world can bear & be."

Progression, however minute, is evident in Song 11 when the speaker recognizes the adolescent Henry's awareness of the transforming power of language, observing that "he dreamt he could fly--/during irregular verbs." Henry's speech becomes particularly erratic in Song 23, for he stutters, introducing words such as "awk," "er," "ech," "sob!!", and "whee," while in Song 40, he introduces the African American dialect, assuming the persona of a man who is "free, black & forty-one."[73] Other languages and voices, both human and inhuman, are introduced within the next ten Songs, joining both the chorus and the audience: Henry observes that "cats mew,/horses scream, man sing" (41), speaks in German, and refers to Greek, Aramaic, and Braille--the language of the deaf. Even a forest fire and the moon are treated as receptive audiences (44). At times, Henry's command over language is almost overwhelming. In Song 180, "The Translator," languages are said to flock to Henry "like women," while in Song 182, he is described as a buoyant individual because of his stories and need "to relate" and "debate." His "wild wit" is described as "riverine," for he "spray[s] thought like surf." Furthermore, in Song 211, Henry is said to have "led with his typewriter," making it fly, and to have "led with his tongue & taught & taught & taught."

Berryman literally raises "neural and biological experience" to the same level as "social contract and communication" in his attempts to confront the abject (PH 189). It is

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[73]In concordance with Kristeva's view of slang, Rich observes, in her discussion of The Dream Songs, that "blackface is the supreme dialect and posture of this country, going straight to the roots of our madness," and that a "man who needs to discourse on the most extreme, most tragic subjects, has recourse to nigger talk" (130). "Nigger talk" can be associated, I believe, with the semiotic, because of its strangeness and rhythmic quality.

words, in the Songs, rather than weapons, that are used in conflict, while body parts are used in the communication process. Words, to put it more succinctly, form wounds, while wounds form words. The potency of the written word is evident in Song 50, in which Henry includes, in his inventory of his "defense system," sharp pencils, in addition to a more predictable arsenal of grenades and other assorted weapons. Of course, the pencils in this example possess a somewhat fleshly, phallic nature, for Henry humorously notes that the "edge of the galaxy has often seen/a defence so stiff," evoking images of a poetic erection of sorts. The power of the spoken or sung word, in turn, is evident in examples discussed previously, including the choking sensation that Henry experiences through the mere "thought of uttering that word" (168), his declaration that he "must sting" and be heard (43), his ability to sing a song "the like of which may bring your heart to break" (143), and his recognition that he will fall into a coma through his verbal repetition (143). Henry even shrieks "a cripple Song" at the same time his left leg is sawed off (319). As he eloquently observes, "It is our kind/to wound. as well as utter" (219).

Nevertheless, there is always a sense of verbal incompletion in The Dream Songs. Despite the agility of his tongue in Song 211, for example, Henry is gripped by a "nostalgia for things unknown," which compels him to growl, or to experience what can be described as a verbal regression into "the semiotic." Similarly, although he begins his public speech "like a cannon/or canon," in Song 212, Henry is left with "nothing more . much now to say" in the "brilliance" of his mother's "smother." In Song 190, Henry describes "a stoppage of voice/so terrible" that he has "no more to say," while in Song 221, he describes the "sound/of typing" as "unspeakable," and takes back all that he has sung.

"A PRIZE TO ROUSE US TOWARD OUR FATE"

The Songs are clearly marked by a continuous motion of upheaval. At times, order is more prominent than disorder, the symbolic more dominant than the semiotic, the patriarchy more powerful than the matriarchy, and words more potent than the flesh to the degree that they inflict physical damage. The control of each of these forces then wanes, only to be reestablished. As I have discussed in this paper, Henry's various personalities dominate before fading into the background as other aspects of his identity flash into being. His view of women changes from circumstance to circumstance, his religious faith is perpetually challenged by his despair, and his drive to become a saviour and to achieve reconciliation with his father is undermined by his apathy and rebellion. He is, ironically, both a monoglot and a polyglot. A sense of linear progression is never fully accomplished in The Dream Songs, for advancement leads, inevitably, to regression, construction to deconstruction, and movement to stasis in a perpetual cyclical rhythm. As Rich observes, the "whole thing is working at once," just as Berryman intended (128).

Upon encountering the chaotic energy, absurd musical quality, and unusual language of The Dream Songs, the reader must inevitably question, of the author, "Why then did he make, at such cost, *crazy* sounds?" (DS 271). After all, as Rich observes, terrible "risks have gone into making this poetry" (127). The poems "are open everywhere; open, at the risk of total breakdown, to nothing less than the life that breathed them: its black vistas, grotesque fantasies, errant affections, memories, lucid indignations, true loves" (127). Berryman is clearly more than a "master technician writing mad, wicked confessional verse" (131), for he is a martyr, in a sense, who sacrifices pieces of himself in the process of writing. The Songs are not "literature," but "poetry" which seeps into "real life" (128). Henry--Berryman--engages in a "brilliant, furious contest against demons" in 77 Dream Songs, and exposes himself in the work as a whole, creating, despite the violence of his images, "a great love poem, and a poem of

victory" (131). Despite the confusion and continuous movement of the Songs, there is, ultimately, a sense of fulfillment.

Berryman observes, in The Freedom of the Poet, that a "dread and fascination" led him away from the creation of short poems to the construction of a long poem composed of many parts. Through the "high and prolonged riskiness" of this project, Berryman dedicated himself, in The Dream Songs, to "the construction of a world rather than the reliance upon one already existent which is available to a small poem" (330). Like Henry, the poet strives, through the creation of this world and its new language, to "waken ancient longings, to remind (of childness),/to laugh, and to hurt" (DS 271). He observes, as if in defiance of critics such as Phillips and Carruth, that one can "go by the rules but there," the place in which "the mysterious final soundings" of music are heard, "the rules don't matter" (204). What does matter, in the end, is the "sound [that] goes roaring," evoking the abject, or the "goblins" that "spring" into view. By challenging and naming the abject, Berryman enables it to "exist," while going, if only momentarily, "beyond it" (PH 190).

Through Henry and poetic language, Berryman crosses physical, moral, and linguistic boundaries in order to probe the abject and to redeem his lost "childness" (DS 271). In the process, Henry becomes an abject figure. As in the case of Christ, who becomes a figure of abjection to Henry as he fixates on the thoughts and actions of this fictional character, Henry draws Berryman to him. Fascinated, yet repulsed, Berryman responds with indignation when connections are made, by critics, between himself and his character. Nevertheless, as Berryman himself observed, "Every murderer strikes the mirror, the lash of the torturer falls on the mirror and cuts the real image" (FP 366). In his "murder" of the dominating symbolic order, traditional religious views, and conceptions of the self, all of which have played an integral part in his creation, Berryman engages in an act of self-mutilation which causes "the real and the imaginary blood [to] flow down together" (366).

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