

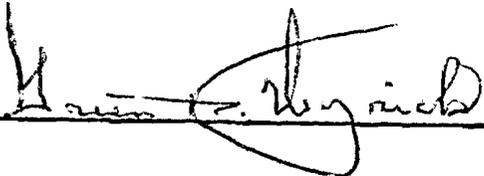
THE DEVELOPMENT OF JOHN BERRYMAN'S
POETIC METHOD

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of English
Kansas State Teachers College

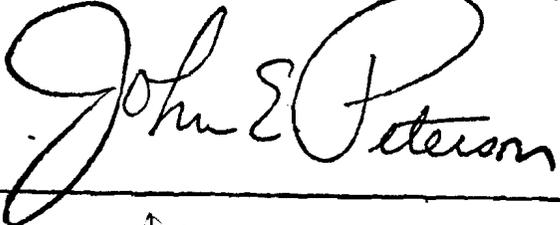
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PREFACE

In the twenty or so years before his death, John McAlpin Berryman became one of the major figures of American poetry in this century. Most readers and reviewers of his poetry have either loved it or loathed it, the latter mainly because of his highly individualized poetic techniques. It is not the intention of this study, however, to attempt to prove that Berryman's works are either "good" or "bad," but to trace the development of his poetic method, or the progress of the various trends evident in his poetry. The few available works concerning the poetry of John Berryman are incomplete, dealing in large with only his Homage to Mistress Bradstreet and his Dream Songs. Although these volumes make up the bulk of his poetic products and are the most important of his works, much of his earlier and later poetry has been greatly overlooked. This study deals with Berryman's poetry--the total output from 1935 until his death in 1972. Toward this end, then, the arrangement of this study follows the chronological order of Berryman's composition, and points out certain recurrent themes and imagery, and departures or experiments in form and technique. Most of the poems included in the text of this study have received little or no critical

attention in themselves, and what attention provided them here is entirely original, unless footnoted.

I wish to thank Dr. Green D. Wyrick for his assistance and encouragement in reading and directing this study, and Dr. Charles E. Walton for his patience and assistance.

Emporia, Kansas

J. K. S.

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CHAPTER I

EARLY DEVELOPMENTS

It is a temptation in poetry to jump from style to style--sometimes without advance and with so little connection to previous work that change is monotony. With Berryman . . . a definite pattern or lurch of alteration goes through it all.¹

By following this "lurch of alteration" through the poetry of John Berryman, it will be possible to follow the progress of the development of his poetic method. Poetic method, as used here, signifies the poet's manner of rendering his particular choice of materials, such as language, theme, meter, rhyme, and stanza form into poetry. Berryman once maintained that his work fell naturally into the categories of his Short Poems, Berryman's Sonnets, Homage to Mistress Bradstreet, and the Dream Songs.² This grouping is, for the most part, the one to be followed in this and in the ensuing chapters. Most of Berryman's short poems were published before 1950, with the exception of a small volume published in 1958 during the composition of the Dream Songs, and which

¹Robert Lowell, "The Poetry of John Berryman," New York Review of Books, II (May 28, 1964), 3.

²Richard Kostelanetz, "Conversation With Berryman," Mass R, XI (Spring, 1970), 345.

will be considered along with them, and his last two volumes, published after the Dream Songs, which will be considered in a separate chapter.

Concerning the development of his poetry from the beginning of his career, Berryman has said, "I began . . . verse-making as a burning, trivial disciple of the great Irish poet William Butler Yeats, and I hope I have moved off from there."³ Actually, Berryman began his career as a poet as a sort of non-voice in poetry, imitating no one and yet having no actual voice of his own. After a few years of poetic apprenticeship, he discovered Yeats, whom he would much rather have actually been, he has said, than have simply resembled, and fell heavily beneath his influence.⁴ Though in his earlier poetry, during the latter 1930's and early 1940's, there is evidence of the influence of such diverse poets as Villon, Landor, Eliot, Auden, Hopkins, Rimbaud, and Cummings, Berryman's heaviest debt in his poetry is due to Yeats.⁵ Robert Lowell has said of Berryman, that he was:

. . . typical of his generation, a studious generation, stuffed with new conventions, and squeezed by the pressures of the unconventional. . . . He was disciplined, yet bohemian, unorthodox in the ardor of

³John Berryman, "Changes," in Poets on Poetry, edited by Howard Nemerov, p. 94.

⁴Ibid., p. 95

⁵Gerard Pervin Meyer, "Vigorous Swimmer in the Poetic Stream," Saturday Review of Literature, XXXI (July 10, 1948), 21.

his admirations, and yet so catholic and generous that he was hampered in finding his own voice.⁶

Besides containing resemblances to many other poets, Berryman's early poetry is filled with the subject matter prevalent in the thirties, especially history and politics as shown in the light of a disillusioned and dangerous decade,⁷ for example, his "River Rouge, 1932":

Snow on the ground. A day in March
Uncomprehending faces move
Toward the machines by which they live,
Locked; not in anger but in hunger march.
Who gave the order on the wall?
Women are there but not in love.
Who was the first to fall?

Their simple question and their need
Ignored, men on their shoulders lift
The loudest man on the night shift
To shout into the plant their winter need.
Who gave the order on the wall?
The barbed wire and the guns aloft.
Who was the first to fall?

Snow on the bloody ground. Men break
And run and women scream as though
They dreamt a dream human snow
And human audience, but now they wake.
Who gave the order on the wall?
Remember a day in March and snow.
Who was the first to fall?⁸

This poem makes an emotional statement about the thirties of the depression, when many were forced from their livelihoods. The innocent people here are seen as the victims of an

⁶Lowell, op. cit., p.3.

⁷Gabriel Pearson, "John Berryman," in The Modern Poet, edited by Ian Hamilton, p. 115.

⁸John Berryman, Poems, p. 7

unreasonable and unjustifiable act of violence. It is interesting to note that in this, as in most of the early poetry of Berryman, there is little, if any, influence of Eliot or Pound, although their influence during the period was great. According to Berryman, it was his great attachment to Yeats during this time which saved him from being overwhelmed by them.

Although Yeats' influence can be felt throughout much of Berryman's poetry, Berryman did perform some sort of break away from it, finding a voice a little more individual than he had had before. Perhaps one of the first poems to mark such a break was "Winter Landscape" (1938-1939).

Compare these lines to those of "River Rouge, 1932":

The three men coming down the winter hill
 . . . Are not aware that in the sandy time
 To come, the evil waste of history
 Outstretched, they will be seen upon the brow
 Of that same hill: When all their company
 Will have been irrecoverably lost,⁹
 (ll. 1, 11-15)

This poem, based on a painting by Breughel, though not in the style of the mature Berryman, is at least his own voice, with no obvious intrusion of his early favorites into it.

One other important development in Berryman's early poetry is shown in "The Ball Poem." In this poem, Berryman discovered the use of the ambiguous pronoun, which allowed him to reserve identity in the poem.

⁹John Berryman, Short Poems, p. 3.

No use to say 'O there are other balls':
 An ultimate shaking grief fixes the boy
 As he stands rigid, trembling, staring down
 All his young days into the harbor where
 His ball went. . . .
 Soon part of me will explore the deep and dark
 Floor of the harbor . . I am everywhere,
 I suffer and move, my mind and my heart move
 With all that move me, under the water
 Or whistling, I am not a little boy.¹⁰

Identity is reserved in that the poet is both in the poem and out of it, while he both is and is not the little boy.¹¹ This type of deliberate ambiguity plays an important part in the development of Berryman's art, especially in the light of his later works, such as Homage to Mistress Bradstreet and the Dream Songs. It also involves a tendency toward duality, which becomes especially apparent in two poems called, "The Animal Trainer (1)" and "The Animal Trainer (2)." These two poems are almost identical through the first twenty-six lines. Both involve the same situation, but represent two solutions, or two aspects of the same solution. These last three poems, "The Ball Poem" and the two "Animal Trainer" poems, in effect foreshadow the later blending of multiple voices in Berryman's works. The last two also reveal, through their subject matter and the dialogue between the animal trainer and the heart, a debt to Yeats' "The Circus

¹⁰Ibid., p. 14.

¹¹Berryman, "Changes," p. 98.

Animals' Desertion" (1939).¹² Berryman simply takes Yeats' desire for the pure thing, the dream, and makes his animal trainer, who is one form of the artist, similarly wish to be ". . . a man alone of noon" (l. 8), whose animals are both his will and his destruction, as they are in Yeats' poem.

Aside from these technical discoveries in his early poetry, Berryman also achieved considerable development in his style. His earliest lines have been called by Robert Lowell, "Parnassian," composed with gentleness, delicacy, and clarity, which later gave way to ". . . the brave labor to give music and nobility to a bare, archaic style, full of elbows, quaintness, and stops."¹³ This contrast of styles can be seen most clearly in Berryman's 1948 volume, The Dispossessed. This volume is made up of many poems published previously in various periodicals, Five Young American Poets (1940), and Poems (1942). It is divided into five sections and consists of fifty poems. The first three sections are mostly poems previously published, and show the earlier styles of Berryman, while the last two sections are poems in a later style. Notice, for example, the stylistic differences between a poem like "A Poem for Bhain," from section three, and a later poem, the first

¹²G. S. Fraser, "A Pride of Poets," Partisan R, XXXV (Summer, 1968), 470.

¹³Lowell, op. cit., p. 3.

from section four, "Canto Amor."

from "A Poem for Bhain"

So by the superficial and summer lake
 We talk, and nothing that we say is heard,
 Neither by the relatives who twitter and ache
 Nor by any traveller nor by any bird.
 (ll. 7-10)

from "Canto Amor"

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

. . . Pale as a star lost in returning skies
 more beautiful than midnight stars more frail
 she moved towards me like chords, a sacrifice;
 (Stanzas 1 and 6)

This latter example is, on a more reserved scale, the style of the mature Berryman. It demonstrates the twisted syntax and forceful language which seems to have begun in the latter poems of The Dispossessed and in Berryman's Sonnets.

The Dispossessed was the volume which first gained for Berryman a fair degree of attention. The poems were generally admired, but nearly everyone has agreed with Dudley Fitts' judgement that the poems, although technically everything anyone could expect from a poet, were tainted with ". . . an aure of academic contrivance," just missing being first-rate, except for the small section of "Nervous Songs."¹⁴ In most of the poems of The Dispossessed, the

¹⁴Dudley Fitts, "Deep in the Unfriendly City," New York Times Book Review, XXIV (June 20, 1948), 4.

speaker is the poet himself, revealing his precepts in a world menacingly hostile. In the "Nervous Songs," however, the poet is not the speaker. In each song there is a specific character, or persona, through whom the poet is able to deliver his views, using the characters in much the same way as, for example, Yeats uses his characters, Crazy Jane and Ossian. These "Nervous Songs" are oddities in the panorama of Berryman's work because of their more objective stance. The only other poems which approach being told as seen through another's eyes, through someone else's voice, are the much later Dream Songs, which are obviously self-revelatory. Even a superficial reading of Berryman's work reveals that much of it is written through the eyes of a self-revealing poet, who reveals his experiences more or less "confessionally," as is the general tendency of his age.¹⁵

Even before The Dispossessed was published, however, Berryman had already written a body of poetry in a style which was obviously his own and not an imitation or concoction of the styles of other poets. These poems, ultimately published as Berryman's Sonnets, show the confessional or self-revealing tendency of most of Berryman's work, but in this instance, in the rather traditional mode of the sonnet sequence.

¹⁵Macha Louis Rosenthal, The New Poets, p. 316.

CHAPTER II

BERRYMAN'S SONNETS

Berryman's Sonnets was written in the mid-fourties, the exact date not known. However, in the course of the work, Berryman calls himself the "adultrous bizzarre of thirty-two." Berryman's birthdate of 1914 plus thirty-two years yields the date of 1946 for their writing. But, during the summer months of 1946, when these sonnets were supposedly written, Berryman would have been only thirty-one years old, not becoming thirty-two until October of that year. Berryman would, then, have been the "adultrous bizzarre of thirty-two" during the summer months of 1947. But whatever the date of their writing, the Sonnets were not published until 1967. Because of their personal and sometimes erotic nature, there is little wonder at the late date of publication. Berryman's Sonnets concerns an intensely felt adulterous affair with a woman named Lise. There are 115 of these sonnets which, read in sequence, relate the history of the entire affair: the desire to meet in early Spring, their meeting and their intense feelings when together and apart, his agony at her departure, her return and his hope of

continuation which lessens as guilt feelings for their adultery build, and her final failure to appear in the Fall.

The subject matter of Berryman's Sonnets covers much of the body of conventional sonnet themes.¹⁶ All of the Sonnets touch on the theme of love, but more specifically, Sonnet 4, for example, also deals with the theme of lust; Sonnet 59, with the theme of separation; Sonnet 75, with the theme of guilt; and Sonnet 38, with the themes of time, death, and the immortality of art. The Sonnets are Petrarchan in form, although Berryman does, at times, take a few liberties, such as the addition of an occasional fifteenth line. The basic iambic pentameter is retained throughout. The subject of Petrarchan sonnets is usually an idealized form of love and lovers, and Berryman's Sonnets is no exception to this convention. The fact that both lovers are married to someone else has centuries of precedent behind it, and presents, of course, no immediate obstacles to them in their pursuit of love.

Berryman is extremely attracted to Lise's beauty, as in Sonnet 2:

Drowned all sound else, I come driven to learn
 Fearful and happy, deafening rumors of
 The complete conversations of the angels, now
 As nude upon some warm lawn softly turn

¹⁶Hayden Carruth, "Declining Occasions," Poetry, CXII (May, 1968), 120.

Toward me the silences of your breasts . . . My vow! . . .
 One knee unnerves the voyeur sky enough.

(l. 9-14)

And, in Sonnet 4, he feels he has become one of the "fools" of Erato, Muse of lyric poetry, love poetry, and marriage songs, forsaking his previous Muse, Melpomene, Muse of tragedy. During the course of this sequence, Berryman, as both lover and poet, experiences the same sort of things that Petrarch's, Sidney's, and Shakespeare's lovers experienced.¹⁷ Later in the sequence, however, doubts and guilt begin to filter into their love, and Berryman writes of the agony of the loss of love. Lise becomes, to him, a torturer, as in Sonnet 110. Here Lise is a svelte, Nazi SS woman, and Berryman assumes the guise of a "helpless Moses." It is evident that by this time their love is hopeless; finished except for their final, mutual recognition of that fact.

The adultrous position of the lovers and their inability to ultimately gain completeness or happiness in some ways resembles the sonnet sequence of George Meredith, Modern Love (1862). Meredith's sequence concerns an unhappy marriage in which the husband takes a mistress as a last resort to happiness, an effort which ultimately fails. The resemblance to Berryman's work is obvious, but the

¹⁷Martin Dodsworth, "Agonistes," The Listener, LXXIX (May, 1968), 612.

question of their influence must remain unanswered. There are several references to Petrarch within the work, and more probably the basis for Berryman's sonnets are those of Petrarch, who also experienced an unrequited love.

Although Meredith's influence on the creation of the Sonnets is questionable, the influence of Donne is somewhat more verifiable. Given Donne's rise to academic popularity in the first half of the Twentieth Century, there should be no surprise that he would have exerted some influence upon poets writing during that period. In Berryman's Sonnets, the most obvious debt to Donne is found in Sonnet 44:

Enact our hammer time; only from time
 Twitch while the wind words my beloved and me
 Once with indulgent tongs for a little free,--
 Days, deer-fleet years, to be a paradigm
 For runaways and the regime's exiles.
 . . The wind lifts, soon, the cold wind reconciles.
(ll. 9-14)

Obviously, this poem owes a large debt to Donne's "The Canonization," in which the lover says he is willing to allow the world to do what it wills, "So you will let me love" (l. 9, "The Canonization").¹⁸

The world has its ways, its laws, and then there is the law of love. Throughout the Sonnets runs an opposition between these laws, as well as that law which forbids such affairs as the one between Berryman and Lise: ". . . the

¹⁸Marius Bewley, "Poetry Chronicle," Hudson R, XX (Autumn, 1967), 502.

terrible I AM--the lost/ Tables of stone with the law graved on them!" (Sonnet 34, ll. 13-14). On the surface, the poet has his sensuous love--"Ah, to work underground/ Slowly and wholly in your vein profound" (Sonnet 34, ll. 6-7), but underneath is the unrest which even subconsciously disturbs his peace: "We think our rents/ Paid, and we nod. O but ghosts crowd, dense/ Down in the dark shop bare stems with their Should/ Not! Should Not sleepwalks where no clocks agree!" (Sonnet 3, ll. 6-9). It is this dilemma, present throughout the work, which helps to lend it unity.¹⁹

Throughout his lifetime, Berryman's style was repeatedly called to attention. In the Sonnets, the style is not as extreme as in later works, but the beginnings are there. The language of the Sonnets is, for the most part, elevated, forceful, and rather coarsely sophisticated. This is brought about in such passages as this one, from Sonnet 4: "Ah when you drift hover before you kiss/ More my mouth yours now, lips grow more to mine" It is this confused type of word order that has also been observed in even more contorted passages in several of Berryman's later works. Typically, Berryman makes much use of elipsis and variations of normal word order. He frequently omits connectives, such as preposition, relative pronouns, and conjunctions, and is sometimes libertine with punctuation.

¹⁹P. A. Stitt, "Berryman's Vein Profound," Minnesota R, VII (1967), 357-358.

The overall effect is to create, when successful, an elliptical effect, and a functional, or intentional, ambiguity of syntax. These techniques, as well as sudden interruptions and shifts from one sentence pattern to another and inversions which create speed and rhythm in the speaker's thoughts, anticipates the like dramatic style in later works.²⁰

There are several sonnets in the work which, in effect, describe how the Sonnets were written, and which point to later developments in style.²¹ Says Berryman in these sonnets, ". . . I fox 'heart', striking a modern breast/
Hollow as a drum, and 'beauty I taboo;/ I want a verse
fresh as a bubble breaks,/ As little false. . . ." (Sonnet 23, ll. 9-12). To attain his fresh verse, he says,

I prod our English: cough me up a word,
Slip me an epithet will justify
My daring fondle, fumble of far fire
Crackling nearly, unreasonable as a surd,
. . . an insight

(Sonnet 66, ll. 9-13),

and at times he finds himself "Crumpling a syntax at a sudden need. . ." (Sonnet 47, l. 6). From this evidence it is obvious that Berryman's style came about as the result of conscious effort.

²⁰William J. Martz, "John Berryman," Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, LXXXV (1969), 22.

²¹Laurence Lieberman, "The Expansional Poet: A Return to Personality," Yale R, LVII (Winter, 1968), 261.

In the Sonnets, however, the crumpled syntax and prodded English is not as crumpled or as prodded as it is even in the latter sections of The Dispossessed. In later works, such as his Homage to Mistress Bradstreet and the Dream Songs, his language sometimes nears chaos, but the language of the Sonnets, although it forshadows that of these later works in some lines, shows a still more largely traditional usage of language than do the later works.

A sonnet is usually considered a single, brief, lyric cry, but in a sequence, a larger development is possible. It has been suggested that the sequence is the characteristic form of the long poem in our era, and that each independent unit within it is a special point of focus which,

. . . taken in order, make for the Poundian periplum, or 'image of successive discoveries, breaking upon the consciousness of the voyager.' The voyager . . . is the speaking sensibility itself, testing the social and cultural landscape, the lines of continuity with the past, and the prospects of reconciliation with the alienating real world at every step along the way.²²

Although a sequence such as this one is not exactly a full-fledged long poem, the beginnings of a cumulative long form are present.²³ The Sonnets, taken together, do tell a story--that of a lover experiencing the pressures of

²²Rosenthal, New Poets, p. 20.

²³Lieberman, op. cit., p.258.

conflicting impulses from the beginning of the affair to its end.²⁴ In the Sonnets, for example, a view of the social landscape can be seen in Sonnet 58:

I am speaking of the Eighteenth Century: kisses
 Opening on betrothals, love like a vise.
 Where shawm and flute flutter the twilight, where
 Conjugal, toothless, has a booth at the Fair,
 The Reno Brothels boom, suddenly we writhe.
 (ll. 10-14)

Here, the atmosphere of his own time is compared by Berryman to that of the Eighteenth Century, which he believes has given a perverse sense of love and sexual behavior to the modern world. The word "writhe" is probably a pun on the couple's position within their society. They writhe, or engage sexually, and they writhe in agony or pain because of their imposed position as adulterers in society. Sonnet 38 presents a concern with the parallels of past and present:

Musculatures and skulls. Later some throng
 Before a colonnade, eagle on goose
 Clampt in an empty sky, time's mild abuse
 In cracks clear down the fresco print; among
 The exaggeration of pose and the long
 Dogged perspective, difficult to choose
 The half-forgotten painter's lost excuse:
 A vanished poet crowned by the Duke for song.

Yours crownless, though he keep four hundred years
 To be mocked so, will not be sorry if
 Some of you keeps, grey eyes, your dulcet lust . .
 So the old fiction fools us on, Hope steers
 Rather us lickerish towards some heiroglyph
 Than whelms us home, loinless and sleepy dust.

²⁴Stephen Stepanchev, "For An Excellent Lady," The New Leader, L (May 22, 1967), 26.

Although identifying with the poet in the ancient fresco, Berryman also realizes that Hope has directed his attention rather to the reason for the fresco's existence than toward its ultimate end. Hope is a force often employed in the Sonnets, as once again in Sonnet 93:

. . . one boldness so in the spirit filed
Brings boldness on--collective--atmospheric--

Character in the end, contented on a slope
Brakeless, a nervy ledge . . . we overgrow
My derrick into midnights and high dawn,
The riot where I'm happy--still I hope
Sometime to dine with you, sometime to go
Sober to bed, a proper citizen.

(ll. 7-14)

Berryman reveals his characteristic boldness here. His adultery is part of that boldness, as well, but in that respect he is alienated from society. He would like to be "a proper citizen," would like himself and Lise to be allowed openly into society.

Although the reason for writing the sonnets is Berryman's love, Lise, she seems to function not as the center of the sonnets, but as a beginning point for the actual center, Berryman himself, his mental state as he reacts to his situation in his relationship to Lise. Lise, in fact, is merely a sketched-in character. The reader knows she is blonde and married, but very few additional details are revealed about her. The volume concerns, essentially, Berryman the poet and voyager who continually makes discoveries about his situation, until its end.

One can see in the Sonnets a progression from the more traditional short forms to the more free form of the long poem, in that the sequence is made up of short, individual poems which contribute to a larger framework. With their writing, Berryman had begun the development of a style distinctly his own, one that would later be notorious. With the use of the sequence, the development of a new, distinct style, and the discovery of the ambiguous use of the pronoun, Berryman had readied himself for the writing of his first actual long poem, Homage to Mistress Bradstreet. And with the acutely personal nature of the Sonnets, Berryman had prepared for later developments in the use of the confessional mode.

CHAPTER III

HOMAGE TO MISTRESS BRADSTREET

Homage to Mistress Bradstreet (1956) marks a point of culmination in the development of Berryman's poetic method. The experiments of his earlier years have been gathered into this single poem with great technical skill. It exhibits some similarity to Hart Crane's long poem, "The Bridge" (1930), in its tendency to relate the poet of the poem ". . . to the American past through the discovery of a viable myth, and to create for its vehicle a grand and exalted language, a language of transfiguration."²⁵

Both Crane and Berryman lived in an age of cultural chaos, and in their need to find words to communicate their poetic visions, they began to use language in such a way that it neared their individual chaotic experiences.²⁶ Berryman, however, had greater control over his material than did Crane.

Tautness, density, linear tension are qualities of Crane and Berryman alike, but the incoherence to which Crane's intuitive procedure disposed him does not endanger the

²⁵Stanley Kunitz, "No Middle Flight," Poetry, XV (July, 1957), 244.

²⁶Waldo Frank (ed.), The Collected Poems of Hart Crane, p. x

Homage at any point. Berryman's control even at the grammatical level is such that a subject introduced at the close of the fifth stanza is united to its predicate after eight intervening elliptical lines with no diminution of lucidity.²⁷

The poem is written in fifty-seven eight-line stanzas, a form invented by Berryman after his long acquaintance with the forms of Yeats in particular.²⁸ Each line is regular--containing the same number of feet in each stanza: five, five, three, four, five, five, three, six. The stanza in this poem becomes the main unit of meaning, subordinating the line. This becomes especially evident from the prevalence of run-over lines, capitalization only at grammatical beginnings, and from the build-up of movement brought about not only by these techniques, but also by the use of sprung rhythm. Berryman's use of sprung rhythm can, of course, be traced back to Hopkins' verse, especially the irregular succession of feet, the varied stress pattern, the alliteration, and the juxtaposition of strong stresses. Witness the variations in stress and succession of feet in the first lines from stanzas 30 and 31: "And out of this I lull. It lessens. Kiss me" (Stanza 30); "--It is Spring's New England. Pussy willows wedge" (Stanza 31). As another rhythmic or metric device, Berryman occasionally uses

²⁷Carol Johnson, "John Berryman and Mistress Bradstreet: A Relation of Reason," Essays Crit., XIV (October, 1964), 388.

²⁸Berryman, "Changes," p. 99.

diaeresis in a manner similar to the musical rest in the hexameter lines, such as that of Stanza 26: "You must not love me, but I do not bid you cease."²⁹ Berryman chose his stanza form, with all its idiosyncracies, because, as he put it, "I wanted something at once flexible and grave, intense and quiet, able to deal with matter both high and low."³⁰

It has been said that Berryman's style in Homage has some things in common with that of Hemingway. The language of Homage, as is the case in much of the work of Hemingway, is a stylistic instrument which conveys not actual conversation, but the impression of conversation, and bears the burdens of both exposition and epiphany at once. Berryman's linguistic quirks play an important part in establishing verisimilitude. Through them, he is able to imply, rather than render an exact copy of, Anne Bradstreet's archaic Seventeenth Century speech.³¹

Generally, Homage to Mistress Bradstreet concerns the investigation of two souls, that of the poet and that of Anne Bradstreet. The poem opens with the voice of the poet, providing an historical frame for what follows--the blending of the voice of the poet with that of Anne Bradstreet,

²⁹Johnson, Essays Crit, 389-390.

³⁰Berryman, "Changes," p. 100.

³¹Johnson, Essays Crit, 392.

which voices modulate from one to the other until they finally present a single voice.³² The poet is the poete maudit of our century, the accursed or alienated poet, who dreams his way back into the time of Anne Bradstreet to become connected, through her, to the American past.³³ By doing this, he seems to echo Pound's use of Sextus Propertius in his own Homage. Pound brings Propertius, in effect, into the present world as he relates present events to past ones, and relates the condition of the modern artist to that of Sextus Propertius. He takes, as well, great liberties with his material in order to meet his own ends. Berryman, however, attempts to take the present back into the past, and at the same time to reconstruct the very person of Anne Bradstreet--also taking some liberties with his material as it suits his purpose.³⁴ He imagines her ". . . with the intensity of a seizure or hallucination. He is in her presence, she seems inside him,"³⁵ as he summons her from across the centuries to woo her through their kinship of poetic sensibilities:

³²William Martz, op. cit., p. 27.

³³Rosenthal, New Poets, p. 124.

³⁴Alan Holder, "Anne Bradstreet Resurrected," Concerning Poetry, II, 1 (1964), 11.

³⁵Lowell, op. cit., p. 3.

Outside the New World winters in grand dark
 white air lashing high thro' the virgin stands
 foxes down foxholes sigh,
 surely the English heart quails, stunned.
 I doubt if Simon than this blast, that sea,
 spares from his rigour for your poetry
 more. We are on each other's hands
 who care. Both of our worlds unhande'd us. Lie stark

thy eyes look to me mild. Out of maize & air
 your body's made, and moves. I summon, see,
 from the centuries it.
 I think you won't stay. How do we
 linger, diminished, in our lovers' air,
 implausibly visible, to whom, a year,
 years, over interims; or not;
 to a long stranger; or not; shimmer & disappear.
 (Stanzas 2-3)

The poet says that Anne's husband was a man not much interested in her poetry. He and Anne, then, must rely on those like themselves who care for poetry. They are both a type of the alienated artist.³⁶ Anne is alienated by being English by birth and transplanted to America, as well as writing, like the Twentieth Century poet, verse ". . . in a land that cared and cares so little for it."³⁷

The Anne Bradstreet presented by Berryman is, for the most part, historically true. He presents her as being essentially rebellious. Anne said herself that she underwent a slight rebellion, or homesickness, upon her

³⁶Rosenthal, New Poets, pp. 124-126.

³⁷Berryman, "Changes," p. 100.

arrival in the New World, "But," she said, "after I was convinced it was the way of God, I submitted to it."³⁸ In Berryman's work, each submission by Anne is followed by a new rebellion.³⁹ First, she rebels against her new environment, then against her barrenness (which Berryman says lasted until about 1633, after three years in the New World⁴⁰), and finally against her unhappy marriage, which leads to her acceptance of the poet as her lover. Anne was indeed upset about her barrenness. Said she, "It pleased God to keep me a long time without a child, which was a great greif to me and cost mee many prayers and tears before I obtained one"⁴¹ Berryman justly, it seems, presents this rebellion as the result of a punishment from God because of Anne's lack of proper love for Him. She has confessed this feeling, saying,

Many times hat Saten troubled me concerning the verity of the scriptures, many times by Atheisme how I could know whether there was a God; I never saw any miracles to confirm me, and those which I read of how did I know but they were feigned.⁴²

It is the rebellion against her unhappy marriage, however, that Berryman has completely fabricated to gain the ends of

³⁸Josephine K. Piercy, Anne Bradstreet, p. 27.

³⁹Berryman, "Changes," p. 100.

⁴⁰Berryman, Homage to Mistress Bradstreet, p. 39.

⁴¹Piercy, op. cit., p. 27.

⁴²Loc. cit.

his poem. "her poems to her husband . . . attest to her warm devotion; they contain surprisingly frank avowals of passionate love."⁴³ Although it appears, surprisingly enough, that Anne Bradstreet was a rebellious woman, she did not find it necessary to rebel openly, as did her contemporary, Anne Hutchinson, but did so in her writing, enabling her to go quietly about her daily domestic duties.⁴⁴ The Seventeenth Century was a period of doubt and questioning, and Anne did not write her poems merely because of natural poetic impulse,

. . . but to find an outlet for a pent-up rebellion against a new world forced upon her and against the Puritan 'pities that seemed the weary drizzle of an unremembered dream.'⁴⁵

It is this Anne that Berryman utilizes in his poem.

In the poem, then, Anne is presented as a domestic woman, one both erotically alive and self-disciplinary:

Vellum I palm, and dream. Their forest dies
to green sward, privets, elms & towers, whence
a nightengale is throbbing.
Women sleep sound. I was happy once . . .
(Something keeps on not happening; I shrink?)
These minutes all their passions and powers sink
and I am not one chance
for an unknown cry or a flicker of unknown eyes.

⁴³Walter Blair and others (eds.), The Literature of the United States, p. 229.

⁴⁴Piercy, op. cit., pp. 28-29.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 33.

Chapped souls ours, by the day Spring's strong
 winds swelled,
 Jack's pulpits arched, more glad. The shawl I pinned
 flaps like a shooting soul
 might in such weather heaven send.
 Succumbing half, in spirit, to a salmon sash
 I prod the nerveless novel succotash--
 I must be disciplined,
 in arms, against that one, and our dissidents, and
 myself.

(Stanzas 10-11)

Anne's sensuality in this particular passage is seen in her desire to become pregnant, a desire which is thwarted (at least for the moment): "Their forest dies/ to green sward" But she does, nevertheless, don a brightly colored sash in coincidence with the sensual spirit of Spring. At the same time, however, she realizes that her thwarted desires must be controlled lest she become, through intolerance of them, a danger to her budding society.

As a woman, Anne seems to be in continual conflict with the forces of both religion and Nature, the two influences most inescapable by early colonists. She rebels against her barrenness, blaming her misfortune on God, who had once before wrought misery upon her in the form of smallpox, when she had found her heart". . . more carnal and sitting loose from God" (Stanza 13, l. 8). Meditating upon her barrenness in the New World Spring, she says: "The winters close, Springs open, no child stirs/ under my withering heart, O seasoned heart/ God grudged his aid" (Stanza 17, (11. 1-13) Both God and Nature stand opposed to her desire.

As the poet speaks to Anne in the middle section of the poem, she momentarily overcomes her fear of God's punishments, saying,

. . . As sings out up on sparkling dark
 a trail of a star & dies,
 while the breath flutters, sounding, mark,
 so shorn ought caresses to us be
 who, deserving nothing, flush and flee
 the darkness of that light,
 a lurching frozen from a warm dream. Talk to me.
 (Stanza 30, ll. 2-8)

The poet obliges with words stuffed with fertility: "It is Spring's New England. Pussy willows wedge/ up in the wet . . ." (Stanza 31, ll. 1-2). But as she begins to yield to him, she sees:

. . . the cruel spread Wings black with saints!
 Silky my breasts, not his, mine, mine to withhold
 or tender, tender.
 I am sifting, nervous, and bold.
 The light is changing. Surrender this loveliness
 you cannot make me do. But I will. Yes.
 What horror, down stormy air,
 warps toward me? My threatening promise faints--
 (Stanza 38)

Her sensual and rebellious natures come into dire conflict with what she believes to be God's will, and she fears His wrath. She disciplines herself, then--her desire stifled, in effect, by the rigid codes of her society⁴⁶--goes on to recount the wretched day-to-day tasks of wife, pilgrim, and mother, commenting on the maturation of her children, the death of her father, her rheumatism and dropsy, and

⁴⁶Ian Hamilton, "John Berryman," The London Magazine, IV (1965), 98.

her ultimate will to die. Only then, after dwelling upon Anne's brutal, struggling existence from her smallpox to her death, does the poet drift back into his own time, where ". . . races murder, foxholes hold men,/ reactor piles wage slow upon the wet brain rime" (Stanza 55, ll. 7-8), still in a hostile America. In the end, Anne remains for him, "a sourcing," the ultimate cause, his origin, ". . . whom my lost candle like the firefly loves." His is a lost candle in that he is an alienated soul, like Anne, and it is like the firefly in that only at times does the flame of his imagination burn brightly enough to penetrate the darkness of centuries.

The poet has made his connection with his origin as an American poet with a world in which the dilemmas of today's America had not yet begun, but were inert. Anne, then, in labor with child, is, in a sense, in labor with the future America, and as her meager life is dwelt upon, its association with her as the future in the past also brings forth the origin of contemporary struggles. The past, through Anne's voice, is related to the present so that the past becomes an origin and the present becomes a destiny.⁴⁷

Berryman, when composing Homage, wanted it to be ". . . something spectacularly NOT The Waste Land."⁴⁸

⁴⁷Pearson, op. cit., pp. 114-118.

⁴⁸Berryman, "Changes," p. 99.

The poem is, essentially, a poem in search of love and vitality and a sense of stability in the world. The poet thus gives homage to Anne both as Muse and mistress (the pun in the title should be obvious). Anne, as a woman, is very much alive--she gives birth to a child and she survives in the primal wilderness of American beginnings. And, as the poet says, as long as he "happens," Anne's life survives in the poet's own more unstable existence. Anne overcomes her new environment, her barrenness, her life of illness, her loss of loved one, and old age. The poet, in identifying with her, hopes to overcome the difficulties inherent in his age; he hopes to survive as she has done; he hopes to gain a sense of endurance and productivity. His act, that of selecting Anne as a surviving source or origin for his kind (the American poet), along with his intense concentration upon her, is somewhat akin to ritual. According to Reuben Wheeler,

Through ritual man acquires a sense of belonging to his community and of its place in the world, its moral pattern and the meaning of life. Ritual is the acting out by man of his sense that the continuum consists of enduring things, of permanent identities, so that the hard way of life becomes the ritual way to manhood, to the full possession of the mystery. By investing both activities with the experience drawn from each, by throwing together the sensible phenomena with the transcendental, life is illuminated and the participant sustained and charged with psychic energies to enable him to overcome the accidents and calamities of existence.⁴⁹

⁴⁹Reuben Wheeler, Man, Nature, and Art, p. 12.

There is actually never any real reason given as to why Anne Bradstreet should be singled out, her life dwelt upon, and she be treated as Muse, mistress, and living myth. The poet, however, can identify with her, and through her with the forces of survival which are, also through her, the American heritage. In her role of life-giver, lover, and survivor, Anne, as both Muse and mistress of the poet, strongly resembles the White Goddess of Robert Graves. The White Goddess is both lover and protector-inspirer of the poet. She is life-giver, and enables the poet, through her grace, to be productive.⁵⁰ The poet's search for identification with the surviving force of Anne is, in a sense, a search for the poetically life-giving and inspiring.

Anne, for the poet of the Twentieth Century, is indeed the Tenth Muse. As Muse, she wrote poems concerning the basic elements of man and the universe--the four elements, the four humors, the four ages of man, and the four seasons. These things comprise that over which she has dominion. Anne, the Tenth Muse, governs man's nature and his environment, and with her as his mistress as well as his poetic Muse, the poet's search for love, life, and stability can be achieved. At the end of the poem, though, he is connected to Anne but vaguely: his "lost candle," (himself, his poetic desires,

⁵⁰ Robert Graves, The White Goddess, p. 490.

his love for Anne), is like a firefly, whose light pulses only occasionally--but does pulse, does exist in the darkness.

By taking place in the poet's mind as an internal monologue between two identities existing in his mind, and by using a strong and forceful language in a search for poetic survival, Berryman's Homage stands as a central point in the development of his poetic method. Many of the trends and techniques of his earlier poetic attempts have been gathered up into this single effort, and it also points to later developments in the use of the sequence and American myth. With this poem, the step toward the method of Berryman's next major endeavor, the Dream Songs, was already being taken.

CHAPTER IV

1955-1968: "IF THE SKY RESEMBLED MORE THE SEA"

A self-revelatory tendency in Berryman's work had made itself obvious with the writing of Berryman's Sonnets, and concern for the survival of the artist had manifested itself in Homage. Certain themes, such as the death of love, the search for love, and the individual's struggle for existence or stability in a hostile world, are present in much of Berryman's work to this point. It is these themes and tendencies that Berryman carried to further lengths in the decade and more following the publication of his first long poem.

After the publication of his Homage, Berryman began composing another long poem, to be called Dream Songs. Before the Dream Songs were issued in book form, however, Berryman published a small volume entitled, His Thought Made Pockets & the Plane Bukt (1958). Coming as it does between the two long poems, one would expect to find at least vestiges of the earlier poem and prefigurings of the later one contained within it.

Perhaps the most obvious vestiges of Homage are to be found in "Venice, 182--." This particular poem reflects

the regularity of stanza form and rhyme scheme which is found in Homage:

White & blue my breathing lady leans
across me in the first light, so we kiss.
The corners of her eyes are white. I miss,
renew. She means
to smother me thro' years of this.

Hell chill young widows in the heel of night--
perduring loves, melody's thrusting, press
flush with the soft skin, whence they sprung! back. Less
ecstasy might
save us for speech & politeness.

(Stanzas 1 and 2)

This particular poem also exhibits a penchant for run-over lines and capitalization only at grammatical beginnings, which was an obvious trait of Homage, besides a strong sprung-rhythm effect.

There is one poem in this volume, "Not to Live," which seems to echo the poet's concern for survival, which appears in Homage, as well as to foreshadow the tragi-comic plight of Henry House in the Dream Songs.

It kissed us, soft, to cut our throats, this coast,
like a malice of the lazy King. I hunt,
& hunt! but find here what to kill:--nothing is blunt,
but phantoming uneases I find. Ghost
on ghost precedes of all most scared us, most
we fled. Howls fall upon this secret, far air: grunt,
shaming for food; you must. I love the King
& it was not I who strangled at the toast
but a flux of a free & dying adjutant:
God be with him. He & God be with us all,
for we are not to live. I cannot wring,
like laundry, blue my soul--indecisive thing . . .
From undergrowth & over odd birds call
and who would starv'd so survive? God save the King.

The narrator of this poem finds the New World no land of plenty. He will not pledge his allegiance to a killing

land and does not want to be identified with it. He prefers the protection of the King, with whom one can at least survive. Throughout this small volume, as in this poem, runs a preoccupation with the hostility of America, as well as ". . . this world like a knife" ("A Sympathy, A Welcome," l. 3), in conflict with the poet, dissatisfied in love and exhibiting a great concern for his existence in a cruel world. The final poem of the volume reveals a longing for a way, or view, of life which he has never realized. It is entitled, "Note to Wang Wei."

How could you be so happy, now some thousand years
 disheveled, puffs of dust?
 It leaves me uneasy at last,
 your poems tease me to the verge of tears
 and your fate. It makes me think.
 It makes me long for mountains & blue waters.
 Makes me wonder how much to allow.
 (I'm reconfirming, God of bolts & bangs,
 of fugues & bucks, whose rocket burns & sings.)
 I wish we could meet for a drink
 in a "freedom from ten thousand matters."
 Be dust myself pretty soon; not now.

Wang Wei's poetry celebrates the joy of living, something which Berryman had somehow not yet found. Life for him has little joy, and he aptly longs for the mountains and blue waters depicted by Wei in his poetry. At the end of it all, though, he knows his end will be as Wei's, "puffs of dust."

The poems of this thin volume pick up the themes of Homage as well as those of The Dispossessed, with which volume His Thought Made Pockets was collected in 1967, make evident the doubts and fears of existence in America, and

also interject autobiography as subject matter--especially obvious in "A Sympathy, A Welcome," in which Berryman offers his son, Paul, and his "wild bad" self as subjects. Through these trends in the development of his poetic method, the odd individual style, the use of autobiographical material, and the view of the modern world as practically anti-human, Berryman leads directly into the Dream Songs.

Berryman began work on his Dream Songs in 1955. These songs appeared in two volumes, 77 Dream Songs (1964) and His Toy, His Dream, His Rest (1968). There are 385 songs in seven sections. Each song in the poem concerns a character named Henry, who, Berryman said, is

. . . a white American in early middle age sometimes in blackface, who has suffered an irreversible loss and talks about himself sometimes in the first person, sometimes in the third, sometimes even in the second; he has a friend, never named, who addresses him as Mr Bones and variants thereof.⁵¹

Berryman refers any problems which may occur in the songs to the title of the work.⁵² One of the first problems encountered is that of the speaking voice which tends to shift from one point of view to another, while still retaining the aspect of being told from a single person's view.

⁵¹ John Berryman, His Toy, His Dream, His Rest, p. ix.

⁵² John Berryman, 77 Dream Songs, p. vii.

All the world like a woolen lover
 once did seem on Henry's side.
 Then came a departure,
 Thereafter nothing fell out as it might or ought.
 I don't see how Henry, pried
 open for all the world to see, survived.

What he has now to say is a long
 wonder the world can bear & be.
 Once in a sycamore I was glad
 all at the top, and I sang.
 Hard on the land wears the strong sea
 and empty grows every bed.

(Song 1, stanzas 2-3)

Both the "he" and the "I" in this song seem to be the same person. Keeping the title, Dream Songs, in mind, and remembering that the nature of dreams is such that the self may view the self, the puzzle begins to clear somewhat.

If the several speaking voices can be considered as several aspects of the self in a dream, then perhaps Henry's friend could also be seen as another part of Henry. If so, it is probable that he is the opposite half of Henry. Henry suffers from an irreversible loss, and his thoughts are continually concerned with death in some way, but Henry's friend is most often a more realistic, world-oriented, and generally stable character. Song 36 provides one example:

The high ones die, die. They die. You look up and
 who's there?

--Easy, easy, Mr Bones. I is on your side.
 I smell your grief.

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

Now there you exaggerate, Sah. We hafta die.
 That is our 'pointed task. Love and die.

--Yes; that makes sense.

But what makes sense between, then? What if I

roiling & babbling & braining, brood on why and
 just sat on the fence?
 --I doubts if you did or do. De choice is lost.
 --It's fool's gold. But I go in for that.
 The boy and the bear
 looked at each other. Man all is tossed
 & lost with groin-wounds by the grand bulls, cat.
 William Faulkner's where?

(Frost being still around.)

Henry's friend, speaking in a Negro dialect, seems to be attempting to head off Henry's depression and self-pity. The Negro voice seems to possess what were once called ". . . black virtues, a sense of survival and even jubilation in spite of frustration, oppression, and injustice, a saucy pragmatic common sense. . . ."53 At other times this character is like the Elizabethan fool, amusing both himself and his slower-witted master at the same time.54 Since Berryman himself has said that Henry talks about himself in various persons, the overall aspect of the several characters, or voices, in the Dream Songs, is that of a dreamer seeing himself within the dream as two persons, Henry and Henry's friend, both of whom function as extensions or divisions of the dreaming self, as he comments about himself to himself and to Henry through his own voice as well as Henry's. The dreamer is, then, both speaker and actor.

⁵³Kenneth Connelly, "Henry Pussycat, He Come Home Good," Yale R, LVIII (Spring, 1969), 425.

⁵⁴William Meredith, "Henry Tasting All the Sweet Bits of Life," Contemp Lit, VI (Winter-Spring, 1965), 30.

In the midst of this dream world is Henry. Here he is portrayed as both loathsome and admirable, containing simultaneously most of the human vices and virtues, despairs and hopes. Those around him both hate him and love him. He is, by the inclusion of nearly all human traits within his person, the essence of Everyman.

Henry, however, is the essence of Twentieth Century Everyman, brooding constantly over death. His father has committed suicide--a fact which hangs curse-like over the entire poem--and Henry broods over his existence in a seemingly death-ridden land:

Tears Henry shed for poor old Hemingway
 Hemingway in despair, Hemingway at the end,
 the end of Hemingway,
 tears in a diningroom in Indiana
 and that was years ago, before his marriage say,
 God to him no worse luck send.

Save us from shotguns & fathers' suicides.
 It all depends on who you're the father of
 if you want to kill yourself--
 a bad example, murder of oneself,
 the final death, in a paroxysm, of love
 for which good mercy hides?

A girl at the door: 'A few coppers pray'
 But to return, to return to Hemingway
 that cruel & gifted man.
 Mercy, my father; do not pull the trigger
 or all my life I'll suffer from your anger
 killing what you began.

(Song 235)

His father's suicide leaves him, essentially, rootless, and often tempts him with death, but leaves him also with the challenge not to betray his children as he was betrayed.

In this particular song, Henry connects Hemingway to his (Henry's) father, both suicides. Hemingway becomes, indeed, "Papa" to Henry, perhaps both as one of the "fathers" of Twentieth Century literature and through his link to Henry's father in suicide. In order to be free of this influence toward death, Henry tries forgiveness (Song 145), but finally ends by standing over his father's grave and spitting upon it in an act of rejection and triumph over his father's action (Song 384).

Throughout the poem, Henry searches for the meaningful aspects of life, for reasons to love and live. He eventually finds some comfort in his daughter, in the final song, which constitutes:

. . . the concluding affirmation of the poem, re-establishing his house . . . and guaranteeing the future. The isolated last three words . . . give us a Molly-Milly-Anna-Miranda, a . . . symbolic life force seen with unsentimental awareness.⁵⁵

Says Henry in the final stanza of the final song: "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." But Henry suffers much before he comes to the final song--which offers no solutions, only a glimmer of hope, only a possible escape from suffering.

In a sense, this suffering, surviving Henry is an imaginary Negro (he sometimes speaks blackface or burnt-cork

⁵⁵Connelly, op. cit., pp. 422-425.

dialect, and much of his humor takes on a bitter quality often found in the humor of Blues). In 1945, Berryman wrote a story called "The Imaginary Jew," in which the narrator strongly identified with Jews and eventually became accused of being one himself, although actually a Catholic. He later realized that through his strong identification with Jews and their problems, he had become, in mind, a Jew himself; that both the real and the imaginary blood flowed together.⁵⁶ In much the same way, Henry is an imaginary Negro. He identifies with Negroes--even his other half is Negro. One critic has said of this identification with the Negro:

The Negro is an expert in survival. He is familiar with death and yet somehow continually picks himself off the very floor, clambers out of the very basement of modern civilization. Supremely a victim, he escapes self-pity through joy in survival. Like the cat, he has nine lives. Henry's search is to learn to be a cat, simply to continue, as coolly as possible, to play it by ear.⁵⁷

Henry does, as well as search for survival and a future in blackface, appear at times in the guise of a cat, as Henry Pussycat, with a "long & glowing tail" (Song 16).

In Henry's search for survival there are at least two major themes: love and death. As Henry's friend said:

⁵⁶John Berryman, "The Imaginary Jew," Kenyon R, VII (Autumn, 1945), 524-539.

⁵⁷Pearson, op. cit., p.124.

"That's our 'pointed task. Love and die" (Song 36, l. 8). Henry lives in a land of death. Many of the songs, in fact, are elegies and laments for lost friends, fellows, and poets, such as R. P. Blackmur, Randall Jarrell, Delmore Schwartz, Robert Frost, and Theodore Roethke. Book four, the midpoint of the poem, is made up of fourteen songs labeled "Op. Post.," as Henry speaks from the grave. Henry "dies" first in Song 26, and several times afterwards, in escape from the strife of living. After "dying" and being buried, Henry is exhumed by those who revere him, but he soon tries to escape back to the peace it afforded him. Although death is always tempting to Henry, he somehow manages to go on living.

It has been established that Berryman knew Yeats' work well, and it may be that one other affinity between them, aside from Berryman's early style, may lie in Berryman's similar search for reasons to survive the tragedy of human existence. Many of Yeats' creations, from *Ossian* to the *Wild Old Wicked Man*, ponder the tragedy of human existence, and finally assert life over the tempting lure of death. From the very first song of the Dream Songs (q.v.), Henry has to cope with just such a question as had Yeats' characters.⁵⁸ In that initial song, Henry wonders at the possibility of the world to bear, using the word to mean both to withstand and to produce. At one time, Henry was

⁵⁸Connelly, op. cit., p. 420.

happily alive in the utmost branches of a tree, the traditional symbol for life. But now every bed grows empty, lessening probability for futurity. The first song thus sets the scene for the following search for survival and love in the face of decay. At one point, Henry is said to be:

. . . full of the death of love,
 cawdor-uneasy, disambitious, mourning
 the whole implausible necessary thing.
 He dropped his voice and sybilled of
 the death of the death of love.

(Song 38, ll. 13-17)

His father's suicide is later connected with the final death of love (Song 235), but Henry prophesies a return of love in this song. With love, it would be possible for Henry to live. His experiences with love are usually not of the most sustaining variety. It has been suggested that Henry is, in the Dream Songs, blindly groping in the trauma of the loss of love. In Berryman's Sonnets, the poet has an affair with a real woman, an affair of intense passion and love, which ultimately dies. In Homage to Mistress Bradstreet, the poet attempts to find love in the ghost of a woman from the past, a woman who lives only in the mind of the poet. In the Dream Songs, poet Henry House is seen living in a world of death, himself "full of the death of love." This death of love is a product of our own era.⁵⁹ Man first stood in awe of God, who "died" with the coming of Copernicus

⁵⁹Carruth, "Occasions," 121.

and Galileo,⁶⁰ and then in awe of Nature, which awe vanished with the coming of the industrial and technological revolutions. This left man with little more than love to believe in, to be in awe of, but even in the early works of Ernest Hemingway there is much evidence of the death of love. It seems that Henry, though he lives in a phantasmagoric world as Mr Bones, which name probabaly denotes his own deathlike existence, is working toward the reaffirmation of love--or at least toward something which might be able to reaffirm it--and in the process, working toward a reaffirmation of life. Henry's best efforts at life-giving love come centered in his family, especially in his son and daughter: "I declare I rejoice/ chiefly in Paul & Martha . . ./ . . . Working & children & pals are the point of the thing,/ for the grand sea awaits us . . ."
 (Song 303, "Three In Heaven I Hope"). With the inevitability of death awaiting all, progeny (futuraity), and friendship become things to live for, that make living valuable.

Henry has been married three times, making him an expert on love and the death of love, and regrets the times his wives and he could not agree, as well as some of his more "animal moments":

. . . If this lady he had had
 scarcely could he have ever forgiven himself
 and how would he have atoned?

⁶⁰Joseph Campbell, The Masks of God, IV, 574.

--Mr Bones, you strong on moral these days, hey?
It's good to be faithful but it ain't natural,
as you knows.

--I knew what I knew when I knew when I was astray,
all those bright painful years, forgiving all
but when Henry & his wives came to blows.

(Song 142)

It is obvious that Henry desires betterment, and he often seems to live by the virtue interjected into Song 66: "'All virtues enter into this world: . . ./ but take one virtue,/ without which a man can hardly hold his own/ . . . that a man/ . . . should always reproach himself'."

All of the songs in the poem seem to add up to an adaptation of a method of writing, of the depiction of "truth," suggested to Berryman by Olive Schreiner in her book, Dreams (1890). One of Berryman's epigraphs to 77 Dream Songs is: "But there is another method," a quote from her book. The method she ascribes to is:

. . .--the method of life we all lead. Here nothing can be prophesied. There is a strange coming and going of feet. Men appear, act and react upon each other, and pass away. When the crisis comes, the man who would fit it does not return. When the footlights are brightest, they are blown out: and what the name of the play is no one knows.⁶¹

In one of her dream visions, she saw a land filled with battered and bruised people, and ironically, the more mutilated they were, the more intense the light, the essence of life, they gave off. Marveling on this, she awakened,

⁶¹Olive Schreiner, quoted by William Wasserstrom, "Cagey John: Berryman as Medecine Man," Centennial Review, X (Summer, 1968), 339.

realizing that her mission was to celebrate the vitality of life in men mutilated but not mastered by their situations, and saying, "I was glad the long day was before me."⁶² Henry, much as Olive Schreiner's vision-people, is battered by the world ("What the world to Henry did will not bear thought."--Song 74, l. 1), but he remains unmastered by it. He may not share Olive Schreiner's gladness at the beginning of the day, but he will go on.

Another insight into Berryman's method is found in another epigraph to 77 Dream Songs, "Go in, brack man, de day's yo' own." This epigraph is from Carl Wittke's Tambo and Bones (1930), a history of blackface minstrelsy in America, which leads to the blackface dialect and bitter humor which runs throughout the Dream Songs. The minstrelsy is also reflected in another epigraph, a quote from, of all places, though aptly enough, Lamentations 3:63: ". . . I am their musick." This is, however, only half of the actual line from Lamentations. The entire line reads: "Behold their sitting down and their rising up: I am their musick." In the minstrel shows,

Tambo and Bones rise and sit in response to questions from the Interlocutor who plays straight man to their end men. He is the one through whom the two speak. He is their music and they are of course his.⁶³

⁶²Olive Schreiner, Dreams, p. 163.

⁶³Wasserstrom, op. cit., p. 339.

In the case of the Dream Songs, the dreamer, whether Berryman or Henry, is the interlocutor, as the other two characters go through their minstrel act. Berryman's method here is partly to ". . . recreate the . . . debasements which degrade and the passions which inspirit the lives of mutilated men, American Negroes, 'Henry' and 'Bones', who convert pain into song,"⁶⁴ a combination of minstrelsy and Olive Schreiner's theory.

Also a probable connection with minstrelsy lies in the three-stanza form of each of Berryman's songs. The later fixed form for the minstrel shows consisted of three parts: the entrance and initial exchange of jokes; the olio, a hoedown with solos by each member of the troupe; and finally, more jokes, skits, farces, and sketches.⁶⁵ The second song of the Dream Songs, "Big Buttons, Coronets: the Advance," is dedicated to Daddy Rice, "who sang and jumped 'Jim Crow,'"⁶⁶ and was evidently inspirational to later minstrels. Says one critic of this song:

"Le's do a hoedown, gal," in the second stanza, prepares for the olio of the third stanza, where Henry goes into his act, does his solo specialty, enacts a black burlesque of white parody, performs a cakewalk-- a masque in which Sir Bones speaks from behind his mask a satiric language taken from Negro rhyming slang,

⁶⁴Loc. cit.

⁶⁵Ibid., p.341.

⁶⁶Berryman, 77, p. viii.

the kind of speech devised in order to hide true meaning from the Man, the enemy.⁶⁷

Notice the language and satire of the passage:

--Sir Bones, or Galahad; astonishin
yo legal & yo good. Is you feel well?
Honey dusk do sprawl.
--Hit's hard. Kinged or thing, though, fling
& wing.
Poll cats are coming, hurrah, hurray.
I votes in my hole.

The language here is nearly chaotic. Henry's friend jests with Henry, calling him "Galahad," because of his astonishing goodness. Henry then satirizes the social system and the voting system by falsely cheering them with a pun on polecats, then further undercutting his cheer with a menacing, sarcastic, and, being a Galahad, ironic statement.

The forms and language of minstrelsy have always been disjunct and disorderly. Long ago, minstrels devised ways to transmit the mood of an idea while simultaneously concealing its reason, a method which, as Berryman uses it, ". . . unites conscious design and unconscious drift,"⁶⁸ creating a combination of reason and dream. Throughout the poem, Berryman mixes formal speech and folk-slang, a technique which

. . . furnishes Henry with the very language and ritual, drawn from the history of the American white man, which first enabled white to imitate black and black to

⁶⁷Wasserstrom, op. cit., p.343.

⁶⁸Ibid., p.344.

parody white. In this way the victim is not possessed by but achieves domination over the tyrant; indeed, he transforms himself into the tyrant's savior⁶⁹

as in Lamentations 3:14: "I was a derision to all my people; and their song all the day." As savior of the tyrant, Henry makes life bearable, helps avoid thoughts of extinction:

Turning it over, considering, like a madman
Henry put forth a book.
No harm resulted from this.
Neither the menstruating stars (nor man) was moved
at once.
Bare dogs drew closer for a second look

and performed their friendly operations there.
Refreshed, the bark rejoiced.
Seasons went and came.
Leaves fell, but only a few.
Something remarkable about this
unshedding bulky bole-proud blue-green moist

thing made by savage & thoughtful
surviving Henry
began to strike the passers from despair
so that sore on their shoulders old men hoisted
six-foot sons and polished women called
small girls to dream awhile toward the flashing
& bursting tree!

(Song 75)

Henry would be a comforting presence. This is in keeping with the dedicatory epigraph to 77 Dream Songs, "Thou drewest near in the day,"⁷⁰ along with the completion of that line, from Lamentations 3:57, "that I called upon thee: thou saidst, fear not." "Fear not" seems to be Henry's

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 345.

⁷⁰Berryman, 77, p. v.

goal-- to make a world where one may not have to fear. He would be a healer, as in Song 75.

Through the introduction of the book of Lamentations, Berryman seems to be trying to initially link the world or environment of his hero, Henry, to that of the speaker of Lamentations, supposedly the prophet Jeremiah, especially in Chapter Three of that book. Chapter Three recounts the afflictions of Jeremiah, which bear great similarities to those of Henry House. In the book of Lamentations, Jeremiah laments the absence of moral strength in his people and the subsequent destruction of Jerusalem. A nearly parallel situation exists in the world of Henry House. People die both physically and figuratively, as if in paraphrase of any number of lines from Lamentations: "The young and the old lie on the ground in the streets: my virgins and my young men are fallen by the sword; thou hast slain them in the day of thine anger . . . and not pitied" (2:21). Henry, at odds with his own God, believes that God is "vast, playful, rough-hewn," and "ought to be curbed" because of His often cruel actions.

This, then, is the world that Henry would repair. And even though Henry would instill confidence ("Fear not"), he himself is frightened, because the world is a frightening place. Two of the epigraphs to the second volume of Dream Songs concern the inevitability of fear:

"No interesting project can be embarked on without fear. I shall be scared to death half the time" (Sir Francis Chichester); "For my part I am always frightened, and very much so. I fear the future of all engagements" (Gordon in (Khartoum),⁷¹ and Henry himself begins the volume safely away in the grave. Once out of it, he longs for the safety it provided him. But though afraid, Henry, like Chichester and Gordon, performs anyway. He must, or die like everyone else. "It seems to be solely a matter of continuing Henry/ voicing & obsessed" (Song 133, ll. 17-18). Henry endures, but he seems finally to accept death as that which he should actually have:

. . . his rotors floated well
to take him back or ahead
Here he paused, though, & thought of those whom
he was leaving
& those whom he would be missing without grieving
in the fair of the land ahead.

'My friends are full' he muttered to himself,
'I'll make no more, so many now are dead.
Backward is the gallant word,
and grapple to my heart the splendid rest,
to leave the new land unknown & undistressed'--
The happy rotors whirred.

(Song 367, ll. 8-18, "Henry's Crisis")

But even though Henry seems to choose death as preferable to continuation, he had said earlier, "The older you get, at once/ the better death looks and/ the more fearful and intolerable" (Song 185, ll. 16-18). This dilemma could be

⁷¹Berryman, His Toy, p. vii.

attributed to the discord of the dream, but such an aphoristic statement as this one would seem to reflect just one more aspect of the tragedy of human existence, being torn between two poles--in continual contradiction.

The technique of the dream also gives rise to the problem of the dream language. Berryman's dream language, springing from American minstrelsy tradition, is less formal, less orderly, and more "contemporary" than is language apart from dreams. According to Berryman, fancy language did not fit with the aspect of blackface, and consequently, Henry's diction was limited. "He doesn't have the language to discuss, for example, Heisenberg's theory of indeterminacy, or scholarly questions, or modern painting."⁷² The limited diction is made up for, however, by the later confusion of the various selves of the dreamer. The dreamer, existing in the first, second, and third persons, is perhaps an extension of the technique of Dante, in his line: ". . . in this our life, I came to myself," but in any case the technique was foreshadowed in Berryman's own career in his much earlier "The Ball Poem." Henry's existence in various persons could also suggest, especially in connection with Henry's last name, "House," that he is all men. The language of the songs is as disordered as dreams are known to sometimes be. Words exist as both noun

⁷²Berryman, quoted by Richard Kostelanetz, op. cit., p. 346.

and verb, both adjective and adverb. Tense, at times, roves,
 ". . . but this seeming disorder is, of course, a way of
 recording complex and ambiguous meaning with . . . economy,
 clarity, and surprise."⁷³ Although disordered at times,
 the songs on other occasions are presented in relatively
 clear and uncomplicated language. Song 42, for example,
 begins clearly enough: "O journeyer, deaf in the mould,
 insane/ with violent travel & death: consider me/ in my
 cast, your first son." But this same song later lapses
 into near incoherence: ". . . Now full craze down/ across
 our continent/ all storms since you gave in, on my pup-tent./
 I have of blast & counter to remercy you/ for hurling me
 downtown" (Il. 8-12). This type of sentence structure is
 highly reminiscent of Berryman's earlier stylistic attempts,
 in his Sonnets, The Dispossessed, and Homage to Mistress
Bradstreet.

In the Dream Songs, though, Berryman's language seems
 to lend itself to the presentation of "surrealistic"
 imagery and ideas.⁷⁴ His dream technique allows him
 great freedom in the order and sequence of presentation
 of his images and ideas. By constructing a world from
 the dreams of an imaginary character, Berryman's imagination

⁷³Connelly, op. cit., p. 426.

⁷⁴"Poetry: Combatting Society With Surrealism," Time,
 XCIII (January 24, 1969), 72.

has been given free expression. The dream technique is closely linked, as well, to earlier writer's experiments with stream of consciousness techniques, the very nature of the dream making Berryman's mode subject to many illogical, or surrealistic, occurrences.

Berryman's overall method in these songs would appear to be a surrealistic ". . . coming and going of feet," which is Olive Schreiner's method, in combination with the blackface parodies which serve to preserve the "dispossessed" members (or non-members) of society from total degradation and despair, centered around various aspects of the themes of love and death. In the farcical yet brutal view of life (which makes the temptation of death hardly surprising) presented in the Dream Songs, Berryman reflects further an aspect of the human condition: the necessary dual view, one being developed by Berryman since his "The Ball Poem." When Henry remarks, ". . . if the sky resembled more the sea," he is well aware of this condition. Berryman himself has said that the poem offers no solutions, and that from that aspect is a failure,⁷⁵ but in the world of Olive Schreiner there are no solutions. Henry is a human being, and as such he, surviving, will have to scold his "heavy daughter," his hope for the future.

⁷⁵Berryman, quoted by Kostelanetz, op. cit., p. 345.

Perhaps the most significant development in the presentation of Berryman's method is the confessional aspect. The Dream Songs are an extension of most of the trends that Berryman's poetry had been taking for more than two decades, but with the interjection of Berryman's own person as exemplary subject matter. In the Dream Songs, Berryman speaks through Henry, but in subsequent volumes, the "middle-man" is omitted, as the reader is confronted with Berryman, stark.

The term, "confessional," is extremely vague. The Dream Songs have been termed thus probably because of their strongly autobiographical nature: Henry's father committed suicide in Florida, and so did Berryman's; Henry's close friends were Delmore Schwartz and Randall Jarrell,⁷⁶ and so were Berryman's; Henry is a professor and a poet, and so was Berryman; Henry has three wives, a son and a daughter, and so did Berryman; Henry is afraid, and Berryman once said: "We have reason to be afraid. This is a terrible place, but we have to exert our wills. I wake up every morning terrified."⁷⁷ This is confessional poetry, one

⁷⁶It is as yet undecided whether or not Jarrell's death was an accident or suicide as there is much room for conjecture. At any rate, the idea of suicide is a strong element in the Dream Songs and may be linked in some way to the deaths of Berryman's friends and fellows, many of which were actual or probable suicides.

⁷⁷Berryman, quoted by Jane Howard, "Whisky and Ink, Whisky and Ink," Life, LVIII (July 21, 1967), 76.

supposes, because the poet's private life is brought to bear as subject matter--but not for its sake alone, not for mere exhibitionism. The problems of the poet's private "lives" are included because of their correlation to those of the culture and nation as a whole.⁷⁸

Macha Rosenthal, through excerpts from letters which, he says, sum up the thought behind the confessional mode, has implied that Berryman's Henry is ". . . like Sophocles' Oedipus, who . . . pursues his indefatigable enquiry, even when he divines that appalling horror awaits him in the answer;" and that Berryman, as confessional poet, has tried to write a book

. . . that make[s] us suffer like the death of someone we love more than ourselves, that make[s] us feel as though we were on the verge of suicide, or lost in a forest remote from all human habitation-- a book [that] should serve as the axe for the frozen sea within us.⁷⁹

Henry does journey through life combatting an end which is both inviting and "fearful and intolerable;" and Berryman, speaking through Henry, wished to write a book such as Henry's, in the already quoted Song 75. Two years after the Dream Songs, he would publish another attempt.

⁷⁸Macha Louis Rosenthal, "The Couch and Poetic Insight," Reporter, XXXII (March 25, 1965), 53.

⁷⁹Rosenthal, New Poets, p. 131.

CHAPTER V

THE FINAL VIEWS

Berryman's two final volumes mark a breaking-off point with many of the devices and techniques he had been using for decades. Whereas his use of language had progressed to near-chaos by the time of the Dream Songs, and his surrealist tendencies were made manifest as well, subsequent volumes are delivered in straightforward simplicity. The language of the 1970 volume, Love & Fame, could even be termed unadorned, lacking as it does the lavish imagery and metaphor of previous works. Berryman's 1972 volume, however, Delusions, Etc., shows a return to richer use of imagery and metaphor. Generally, both volumes point to Berryman's views in his final years concerning the possibility of meaningful life for an individual human being in our age. These final poems are, perhaps, the most directly confessional of all Berryman's confessional poetry.

In an interview in 1970, Berryman said that after doing one thing, one liked to do something as different as possible.⁸

⁸⁰Kostelanetz, op. cit., p. 347.

His Love & Fame seems to be just that. He has gone from the forceful, chaotic language of his Homage and Dream Songs, to the utter simplicity of speech of the 1970 work. Also, rather than use autobiography for obvious social and cultural identification, Berryman uses his own experiences to work towards a more personal understanding, although during the course of the poems these personal experiences do take on a more universal tone. The work consists of fifty-nine individual poems, fifty-seven of which are written in what might be called free-verse quatrains, in contrast with the three 6-line variously rhymed stanza form of his previous work, and the 8-line variously rhymed stanza form of his Homage. The formal quality is still evident, but not as obvious as before. The book is divided into four sections, each dealing with a different period from Berryman's life. The persona is unconcealed, and the language is more casual and prosaic than in earlier works.

Love & Fame is dedicated to the 19th Century French poet, Tristan Corbiere. Corbiere was one of the three poets, Rimbaud and Mallarme being the other two, whom Verlaine included in his Poetes Maudits (1889). The term "cursed" (maudit) suggests that these poets were victimized both by fate and by society.⁸¹ M. L. Rosenthal has termed Berryman

⁸¹Stanley Kunitz and Vineta Colby (eds.), European Authors 1000-1900, p. 197.

poete maudit as well, viewing him through the distressed poet of Homage and through Henry in the more confessional Dream Songs.⁸² In the Dream Songs, Henry identified with the Negro, as he survived against all hope of surviving. In Love & Fame, Berryman identifies with the Toltecs, an ancient Mexican Indian tribe with a high degree of civilization. Berryman identifies with an extinct race of Americans whose world had a greater degree of stability and order than his own. Because of this identification, the modern world revolts him in its disorder and vulgarity. In identifying with the Toltecs, as a Toltec warrior, Berryman remains the alienated or cursed poet, living among those who are wholly unlike him, an alien American in his native land. Throughout his life as a "cursed" poet, Berryman had to cope with the meanness of the world as well as his own vices and self-reproaches. One may see in his epigraph concerning Corbiere, a certain admiration and identification with the things that "cursed" poets had done. He praises Corbiere's "mockery of the pretentious great" and his "self-revelations," leading the reader directly into his (Berryman's) own method in Love & Fame, where he discounts all except God, as he reveals himself for all to see.

The main concern of Love & Fame is Berryman's life, love and fame being his sole accomplishments. Berryman's

⁸²Rosenthal, New Poets, p. 124.

life is told in his own voice, beginning with his early college days. He related his first loves and his first poetic attempts, then leads on through his life--his studies under Mark Van Doren, his discovery of R. P. Blackmur's criticism, his winning of his school's top prize of a Kellet fellowship at Cambridge, his loves and poetic attempts in England, his meeting Dylan Thomas and Yeats, his budding fame as poet and scholar, the horror of his later life as a Twentieth Century American, and his ultimate acceptance of God as guide and master.

In this picture of Berryman, love and fame are shown to be not enough for an individual to rest his life upon, especially since, after all his acquired fame, which he knows will not last (Sonnet 38), he has found that love also dies. In the first poem, for example, after relating his successes with his publishers in New York and London and his being featured in Time, with "photographs all over," he writes, somewhat sadly and regretfully, of a girl with whom he had long ago been in love, "She muttered something in my ear I've forgotten as we danced" ("Her & It," l. 20). He has found his fame, but he regrets misspent chances for love. Most of the loves portrayed in this volume are, in fact, merely brief sexual encounters, rather than relationships of a more lasting and satisfying nature. Berryman has, nonetheless, "loved" much, and has been loved similarly in return. Love and fame, the two things that are supposed to

bring happiness to all lives, were not sufficient to do so for Berryman.

Although Love & Fame deals with Berryman's life, he claims it is not an autobiography in verse. In a poem entitled "Message," he says the volume is "Impressions, structures, tales, from Columbia in the Thirties/ & the Michaelmas term at Cambridge in '36,/ followed by some later. It's not my life./ That's occluded and lost" (ll. 5-8). This revelation is followed by the statement that we all will die, and that "The thing meanwhile, I suppose, is to be courageous & kind" (l. 24). He regards himself as a lost soul, ignorant of any real, lasting values in life.

Critic Hayden Carruth has said of the substance of the book, that it is:

. . . the hang-up between faculty and skepticism, self reliance and self doubt, hope and despair which we all know; it is the experience of vacillation, experience with a negative value, the modern experience par excellence. . . .⁸³

Perhaps still at the heart of this "hang-up" is the omnipresent fact of Berryman's father's suicide. This fact appears in a substantial number of Berryman's more autobiographical poems throughout his work, and especially in the last three volumes.

In Dream Song "235," Henry's lament is that his father, in his suicide, had killed, in a sense, what he (Henry's

⁸³Hayden Carruth, "Love, Art, and Money," Nation, CCXI (November 2, 1970), 437.

father) had begun--Henry being one of those things. In Love & Fame, there is an extension of this same feeling, reflected in the vacillation between hope and despair, evincing the feeling of rootlessness displayed in the Dream Songs. Berryman says in "Of Suicide," that "A basis rocklike of love & friendship/ for all this world-wide madness seems to be needed" (ll. 9-10). This "basis" is Berryman's hope, his desire for what should be, as he contemplates suicide. The "basis rocklike of love & friendship" has also been seen as one of the problems with which Henry House was concerned that found its way unsolved into Berryman's succeeding volume.

By the time of the writing of this volume, Berryman evidently had begun to feel that his life had been rather misspent--"occluded and lost". He reveals his life as a series of various affairs and instances of academic triumph, and as hospitals and a sanatorium filled with horrors against which he found himself impotent, before he finally brings the reader up to his present life, one of repentance and awe of the Lord. In this final group of poems, "Eleven Addresses to the Lord," he writes:

Sole watchman of the flying stars, guard me
 against my flicker of impulse lust: teach me
 to see them as sisters & daughters. Sustain
 my grand endeavors: husbandship & crafting.
 ("Address to the Lord 3," ll. 1-4)

Once again, as before noted in the chapter concerning Henry, the "animal moments" are regretted and Berryman enacts the

virtue of reproaching himself. In the tenth "Address to the Lord," Berryman remarks: "Father Hopkins said the only true literary critic is Christ./ Let me lie down exhausted, content with that" (ll. 15-16). With this statement, he relegates all fame, acclaim, and disparaging words to limbo. They mean nothing since Christ is the final judge. And since that is so, his "grand endeavors: husbandship & crafting," are now to be positively directed toward that same finality, as Berryman is humble before God--"Shield & fresh fountain! Manifeste! Even mine" ("Address to the Lord 1," ll. 19-20).

As the "modern experience par excellence," Berryman's does at last become edged with a universal hue. He becomes the imperfect individual asking the questions of our agonized mortal race.⁸⁴ Throughout his life he has been troubled deeply by man's mortality, especially his own, before finally turning to God as the ultimate answer.

Whereas previous works have revealed a steady development of several techniques, Love & Fame reveals unexpected departures from them. In this work the development of the blend of voices, which culminated in the Dream Songs, ends. Here the contorted syntactical routines end. Here, confession seems the main point--to get it off his chest,

⁸⁴Dan Jaffe, Review of Love & Fame, Saturday Review, LIV (April 13, 1971), 31.

to start anew, to cleanse himself publicly and before the Lord, plainly and simply.

When Berryman underwent his sudden conversion to the words of the Lord, his style also underwent a sudden transformation of tonality. Whereas the first three sections concerning Berryman's life heretofore are raucous in their boasting and gloating over academic and sexual triumphs, in what seems an almost deliberate "caricaturing, in bold poster colors, the bumptuous, lost eagerness of his youth,"⁸⁵ the final section shows a new quietness, in seeming acceptance of whatever will befall him.

Coinciding with the changes in technique is an abrupt change in attitude toward God in Love & Fame, after the rather bitter attitude toward any god in both Homage and the Dream Songs. The poet of Homage says: "I cannot feel myself God waits. He flies/ nearer a kindly world; or he is flown./ One Saturday's rescue/ won't show . . ." (ll. 273-276). God for him does not await man after death. For him there is no Salvation. To poet Henry House of the Dream Songs, God is perhaps "a slob,/ playful, vast, rough-hewn" (Song 238, ll. 5-6), resembling an etching by Goya, a paranoid God that "ought to be curbed" (Song 238, l. 12). Man, to Henry, is probably superior to God, because he is

⁸⁵Walter Clemons, "Man on a Tightrope," Newsweek, LXXIX (May 1, 1972), 113.

able to be courageous in the face of such a God. But to Berryman in Love & Fame, God is "Master of beauty," "sole watchman of the flying stars," "ingenious & beneficial Father," and the words of the Savior are "short, precise, terrible, & full of refreshment." This is a striking change in attitude, and according to Berryman it came suddenly:

. . . Confusions & afflictions
followed my days. Wives left me.
Bankrupt I closed my doors. You pierced the roof
twice & again. Finally you opened my eyes.

My double nature fused in that point of time
three weeks ago day before yesterday.

("Address to the Lord 6," ll. 9-14)

The desperate hopes and works of Henry house in the face of a void have given way to Berryman the humble poet before God, accepting whatever God wills.

Berryman does not blindly accept the dogma of any church upon his conversion to the words of the Lord. His view is Christian, but has little to do with the beliefs of any specific organized church. He says he cannot "love" God because God is as unknowable to him as he (Berryman) is to his guinea pigs, but he will go as far as gratitude and awe. He does not know if there can be life after death from either the scientific or philosophic points of view, but he believes all things are possible for God, and he is content with being amazed. He, who previously wished the Lord to be curbed, now wills the Lord to curb him. He who was Henry, undaunted by the forces of the universe,

is now humble. He will accept death from the Lord's hand, asking only that his widow be attended afterwards ("Address to the Lord 5," ll. 13-16).

But even before God Berryman cannot forget suicide. In his final address to the Lord, the initial image is that of a suicide, Germanicus, leaping upon a lion to end his lawless life. Two years after the appearance of Love & Fame, Berryman was to put an end to his own lawless life in a similar manner, leaping to his death from a bridge over the Mississippi River. It is evident that Berryman's rootlessness, the existence built upon death after his father's suicide, was never completely dispelled.

The general organization of Love & Fame can be said to parallel, to a degree, the growth of the poet's mind, but its content seems to have a closer affinity to some of the sayings of the Roman philosopher, Epictetus. Berryman gives this clue as he says, "Epictetus is in some ways my favorite philosopher" ("Of Suicide," l. 11). He does not say why this is so, but one may infer why from the title of the poem, and from the words of Epictetus:

But if life and its burdens become absolutely intolerable may we not go back to God, from whom we came? may we not show thieves and robbers, and tyrants who claim power over us by means of our bodies and possessions, that they have no power? In a word, may we not commit suicide?⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Rev. F. W. Farrar, Seekers after God, p. 244.

To one whose thoughts have often had occasion to dwell upon that final act, the words of Epictetus would have some solace. By later turning to God, Berryman also follows a precept of Epictetus' ideal being: to be completely resigned to his god, and attempt to conquer his passions and reveal his life openly to his god and to all men. Also, for Epictetus, the only way to true happiness lies in true freedom, the inner conquest of every ignoble fear, and perfect self government, which can only be attained with the help of a supreme being.⁸⁷ One other reason for Epictetus' popularity with Berryman may lie in the fact that many of Epictetus' stoic teachings were later integrated into the Christian way of life, particularly his view of the brotherhood of men.⁸⁸ Berryman himself wished for a "basis rocklike of friendship & love," itself a wish for brotherhood.

In this volume, Berryman also shows admiration for Pascal, an admiration that seems to stem from Pascal's vision of God⁸⁹ and his life of intense religiosity. But perhaps beneath that surface admiration lies an identification with Pascal's view of the human condition:

. . . unintegrated both within and without, the sport of every wind that blows, incapable of truth or of knowledge,

⁸⁷Ibid., pp. 253-254.

⁸⁸B. A. G. Fuller, A History of Philosophy, pp. 267-268.

⁸⁹Berryman, Love & Fame, "Address to the Lord 4," p. 89.

inconstant in his loves, his hates, his beliefs, his courage: condemned to find peace nowhere. . . . It is quite obvious that man is . . . a wanderer in his mortal life; he has fallen from his true estate and cannot find it again. . . . he encounters on all hands nothing but impenetrable darkness.⁹⁰

It is in spite of this view that Pascal can believe in God, and perhaps is, since Berryman's view of man has been seen to be similar, another source of admiration for Pascal.

Berryman seems to share Pascal's belief that the ways of God are unknowable to man,⁹¹ as he says: "incomprehensible to man your ways./ May be the Devil after all exists./ 'I don't try to reconcile anything' said the poet at eighty,/ 'This is a damned strange world'" ("Address to the Lord 2," 11. 13-16).

Berryman's entire life, as has been seen in the confessional material of the Dream Songs and in Love & Fame, has been a struggle against the meaninglessness of life and the lure of suicide, a struggle against the "absurd" of Camus. In the Dream Songs, Henry lives on in spite of the world, in search for a meaning, finding only a glimmer of hope in his "heavy daughter." As Camus' Merusault, Berryman's Henry is sure of only one thing: death--but he revolts against its imminence and searches for more to believe in. For Camus, and Berryman, the absurd "does not

⁹⁰F. T. H. Fletcher, Pascal and the Mystical Tradition, pp. 83-84.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 151.

invite the readers to condole with their unfortunate condition, but to search for happiness."⁹² In Love & Fame, however, in the central poem, "Message," Berryman seems to have finally given up his life as almost completely meaningless and misspent, "Children & high art" being the sole point for living. Death is certain, but meanwhile he will be "courageous and kind." But, in a final search for happiness, for fulfillment, for meaning to his life, he turns to God, the omnipotent and ultimate hope.

The final section of this volume begins Berryman's praises of the Lord. The style is plain and undecorated, the message straightforward. Like Pascal, he is able to accept God in the face of the contradictions inherent in humankind. In Delusions, Etc., this latter aspect is also manifest, but the method of presentation takes on a wider range of tonalities and images.

As is almost usual with Berryman's works, his epigraphs seem to lead the way into the content of his volumes. In Delusions, Etc., there are five such epigraphs. The first is: "We haue piped vnto you, and ye haue not danced:/ wee haue mourned vnto you, and you haue not lamented." It tends to aim at a connection with Berryman's previous poetic attempts--he has piped and mourned, but no one has responded

⁹²Gladys dePuentes, "Camus and the Absurd," Quivira, XIII (1968), 10.

to either. The second epigraph, "On parle toujours de 'l'art religieux'. L'art est religieux," reveals Berryman's attitude here in his new volume. Art is religious, and Christ is the final critic. The third epigraph concerns the character of Eugene Irtenev and his and everyone's insanity. Berryman, then, contends that nearly everyone is somewhat insane. The fourth epigraph is "Feu! feu! feu!," perhaps signifying an alarm over the general insanity which, along with the statements concerning art and religion, is probably the general failure to accept God. Thus, the final epigraph, line 12 of the Canterbury Tales, "Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages," becomes the way to combat the insanity, for in the Spring, the time of life, did the devoted make religious pilgrimage to Canterbury to insure their righteousness.

Almost half of the forty-three poems in the volume are of a purely religious nature, in praise of God. The volume is divided into five different sections, each dealing with different subject matter. Section I deals with the canonical hours or offices of the day; Section II deals with five influential people; Section three concerns various aspects of death and life in death through the grace of God; Section IV consists of five semi-humorous poems arranged as a scherzo; and section V maintains the glory of God in the face of past delusions and future ambiguities.

Berryman's final volume begins with much of the same quietness which ended the previous one. Nearly every poem exhibits the religious concerns of Berryman, either directly or indirectly. Since Christ is the ultimate literary critic, his poetry is devoted in the main to the praise of God and to the knowledge of a life that can be more fully and vitally lived, as well as a knowledge of the horrors one may encounter in life and overcome through God.

The first section of Delusions, Etc., consists of a series of canonical offices revealing further Berryman's total acceptance of God into almost every facet of his life and every hour of the day; he also reveals that even in the acceptance of God he still must live his own life. He feels he is somewhat depraved, and his life lost to sin. In "Tierce," he remembers his sincere service to God as a child, then adds:

But this world that was not. Lavender & oval,
 lilac, dissolve into one's saying hurriedly
 'In sex my husband is brutal, beating, dirty, and drunk.'
 Has this become Thy will, Thou Reconciler?

(11. 21-24)

Berryman still despairs over his misspent life of excess, and also over his continuing tendency to yet commit sin. But when he is able to give himself to God completely, from time to time, he is able to regain a feeling of life, which lifts him from despair to joy, and he is able to relegate himself to the will of God. In "Compline," he says after

relating his rapture at being in league with God:

Heard sapphire flutings. The winter will end. I
 remember You.
 The sky was red. My pillow's cold & blanched.
 There are no fair bells in this city. This fireless
 house
 lies down at Your disposal as usual! Amen!
 (ll. 45-48)

Here, the acceptance of God leads to the coming of Spring, the beginning of life. The red evening sky is perhaps a reference to the old saying: ". . . red sky at night, sailor's delight," signifying a promise of fair weather for the next day. Where Berryman is, there seem to be only the necessities of sustaining life--mainly the Lord, for his house is fireless and cold. But there is promise of the coming of Spring.

Section II of Delusions deals with the influential personages of George Washington, Beethoven, Emily Dickenson, Georg Trakl, and Dylan Thomas. It would seem that there must be a common factor linking these people together in this single section, something also of significance to Berryman. When viewing these five poems, one finds three of them to concern poets. All suffered tragically, as did Berryman. In the poem, "Drugs Alcohol Little Sister," Berryman seems to feel some sense of brotherhood with the lost and suffering poet Georg Trakl, who died shortly after Berryman's birth. In "In Memoriam" Berryman elegiacly reveals his close friendship with Dylan Thomas. And he praises the verse of another fellow, Emily Dickenson, over

his own. This feeling of brotherhood and admiration extends as well to both Beethoven and Washington. The poem concerning Washington is perhaps one of the most difficult of all Berryman's poems. It basically is a review of the life of Washington from the Revolution onward. Washington's own life was dedicated to the idea of brotherhood, and it is revealed as such in this poem, as he deliriously in death calls to his wife to bring the wounded to him, an action which reveals a belief that he is one of the common men himself. As seen in Love & Fame, brotherhood was one of the things most desired by Berryman as an element necessary to the ultimate stability of life. Berryman shows his admiration and feelings of kindred for those from the past, and the emotions, the joys and sufferings of true friendship and brotherhood in his elegy on Dylan Thomas.

The poems of Section III have to do with man's "discrepancies," as in Section I. The first poem of the section sets the tone for those that follow. Berryman uses the image of the sculpted Eve of Gislebertus, ". . . the first female nude since antiquity to give a sense of the pleasures of the body,"⁹³ dwelling upon her fatal act-- in which he, still seeking knowledge, is a distant participant. "Eve & her envy roving slammed me down/ prone in discrepancy . . ." ("Gislebertus Eve," ll. 1-2), he says,

⁹³Kenneth Clark, Civilisation, p. 47.

both identifying with and abhorring the act. ". . . we're nowhere," he says, "rapt in delusion, where wierd particles/ frantic & Ditheletic orbit our/ revolutionary natures" ("Gislebertus' Eve," ll. 10-13). This aspect, as well as the preserving quality of the acceptance of God, also present in latent form, between the lines, in this poem, is reflected in the subsequent poems of this section. In "Tampa Stomp," for example, Berryman uses the concept of "delusions," that of being actually "nowhere," saying:

Ah, an antiquity, a chatter of ghosts.
 Half the fish now in half the time
 since those blue days died. We're running out
 of time & fathers, sore, artless about it.
 (ll. 13-16)

And in the poem, "No," he utilizes the same idea:

Dust in my sore mouth, this deafening wind,
 frightful spaces down from all sides, I'm pale
 I faint for some soft & solid & sudden way out
 as quiet as hemlock in that Attic prose
 (ll. 9-12)

The forms of delusion, as evident, can often take different avenues of approach.

Many of the poems concern the loss of meaning and value from life, leading to Berryman's later acceptance of the Lord. "The Form" relates Berryman's contorted state before accepting God, and then that acceptance:

Mutinous and free I drifted off
 unsightly. I did not see the creatures watch.
 I had forgotten about the creatures, which
 were kind, and whether any of them was mine.
 . . . All that life ahead alone
 vised me from midnight. I prepared for dawn.

An odd slight thought like a key slid somewhere:
 'Only tomorrow.' Wondering, I said: 'Oh.
 It's possible, then.'

My light terrible body unlocked, I leaned
 upon You.

(11. 1-4, 24-29)

After this incident, Berryman was able to at last function more stably, and give praise to God, to Christ, and to Mary.

Section IV is a scherzo, that is, it is sportive and amusing. Most of the five poems of this section have an amusing aspect to them, but all of them have an equally serious side. The poem, "Navajo Setting the Record Straight," for example, presents a native American telling-off (setting the record straight) an American of Greek descent, a scene of some humor. But its seriousness becomes especially evident in the final image of the poem, that of a motherless child before an earthen hut revealing the Indians' true condition of poverty and deprivation, while the Greek is apparently prosperous.

Section V is a group of eleven poems, mostly prayers. As in several prayers in his previous volume, Berryman here too implores God to make him fit for his ultimate end:

Lord of happenings, & little things,
 muster me westward fitter to my end--
 which has got to be Your strange end for me--
 and toughen me effective to the tribes en route.

("A Usual Prayer," 11. 13-16)

The Lord is also seen by Berryman as one of the few things that does actually exist and that will persist in existing. By using modern scientific techniques, it has been proven

(says Berryman) that ninety percent of the mass of the universe could fly apart at any moment, casting doubts by Berryman on the longevity of his existence. "My Lord," he says, "I'm glad we don't/ on x or y depend for Your being there./ I know You are there. The sweat is, I am here" ("Certainty Before Lunch," ll. 14-16). Also in this poem, the idea of "delusions" is put into play once more.

The final poem of the volume, "King David Dances," seems to sum up the content of Delusions, as well as Berryman's final outlook on life as revealed in his last two volumes of poetry.

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

Berryman, in this confessional volume, uses the Biblical figure of King David as a parallel to his own life. David was a servant of God who knew that he had sinned and that God was often wroth with him for that reason. Berryman, as he presents himself in his final volumes, is in the same position as was David. He wishes to serve God, but being human, he often falls into error. The figure of David dancing is ambiguous in meaning. Yeats, one of the greater influences upon the poetry of Berryman, asked, "How can we

know the dancer from the dance?" ("Among School Children," l. 64). In the case of Berryman's poem, the dancing figure of King David seems to have been used in the same manner, signifying that the man, David, is inseparable from his thoughts and deeds. He is as he is, and performs as he is want to do in spite of the corruptions and contradictions which surround him, and of which he is aware. The ambiguities are unimportant since God only knows all, and since to be human is to experience ambiguities.

The overall organization of this particular volume is probably unimportant. Each section, with its own particular group of poems, seems to exist separately, but at the same time to contribute to the general theme of the volume in its entirety--that of delusions or ambiguities, the fact of not knowing exactly the true meaning of existence, but all the same performing as one must.

In the last two volumes produced by Berryman, though many of the previous technical devices were discontinued, the major plagues of Berryman remained to the end--particularly those of despair at the condition of man, especially his own misspent one, the necessary search for survival, the lure of suicide, and a nearly totally ambiguous existence.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

From the beginning to the end of his career, Berryman was concerned with "crafting," one of his "grand endeavors," and the place of the individual, especially the artist, in a hostile world. As early as 1940, he first put forth his views about his craft in his introduction to his "Twenty Poems."

One of the reasons for writing verse is a delight in craftsmanship--rarely for its own sake, mainly as it seizes and makes visible its subject. Versification, rime, stanza form, trope are the tools. They provide the means by which the writer can shape from an experience in itself usually vague, mere feeling or phrase, something that is coherent, directed, intelligible

In his attempt to create something "coherent, directed, intelligible," Berryman began to strain his language to the very edge of sense, a tendency which many would claim made his poetry anything but "coherent, directed, intelligible." But the attempt, as he said, was to create clarity out of some vague experience. That being the case, his use of language can be seen as an attempt to come as close to that vague experience as possible, while still maintaining

⁹³Berryman, "Twenty Poems," in Five Young American Poets, p. 45.

coherence in his language. It may be, however, that at times his language did cross the line into the unintelligible.

At any rate, Berryman's use of language, his syntax especially, has often been noted as being rather idiosyncratic. T. S. Eliot, however, noted long ago ". . . that perpetual slight alteration of language, words perpetually juxtaposed in new and sudden combinations . . ." ⁹⁴ is a part of poetry. And Robert Lowell, remembering Berryman's love for the later plays of Shakespeare, said:

He would recite magical, little-known speeches, remarkable for their exploratory syntax and dramatic flights of psychology--in his new poems *The Dispossessed* each sentence and stanza seemed to clutch after all the twists and experiments spread over many pages of the late Shakespeare. ⁹⁵

It is difficult to say whether or not this view is correct, but Berryman himself, in his Love & Fame, leads the reader in a poem entitled, "Olympus," to a review by R. P. Blackmur in Poetry magazine. Blackmur's words here, Berryman maintains, gave Blackmur the status of "Law-giver." The words of Blackmur were the following:

The art of poetry is amply distinguished from the manufacture of verse by the animating presence in the poetry of a fresh idiom: language so twisted and posed in a form that it not only expresses the matter in hand but adds to the stock of available reality. Since

⁹⁴T. S. Eliot, quoted by Cleanth Brooks, "The Language of Paradox," in John Donne's Poetry, edited by A. L. Clemens, p. 178.

⁹⁵Lowell, op. cit. p. 3.

we no longer live at the state where the creation of idiom is the natural consequence of the use of language, many of our best practitioners have necessarily to manufacture a good deal of mere competent verse in order to produce a few good poems.⁹⁶

For Berryman, writing then became a continual search for ". . . an inclusive style, a style that could use his erudition, and catch the high, even frenetic, intensity of his experience, disgusts, and enthusiasm;"⁹⁷ it became an effort to create a fresh idiom and to produce more than competent poetry.

In his search for an inclusive style, a fresh idiom, his work did become extremely idiosyncratic--becoming finally one of the few immediately recognizable styles of his generation--which necessarily led many critics and readers to apply the label of "mannerist" to him, as if it were a disease. But one critic, Carol Johnson, has made the point that in our age, mannerism is almost unavoidable:

It is probably impossible for the contemporary poet to be anything but a mannerist in some respect. Circumstances compel one to assume that never again can the act of poetry be so facile a task as setting ecstatic saints afloat upon marble clouds. Our deep psychological unrest cannot be assuaged by the illusion of space or by mere reference to tradition. Language and readers alike must be recreated, rather than simply reconvened, anew now with each successive work.

⁹⁶ Richard P. Blackmur, Review of Horizons of Death by Norman Macleod, Poetry, XLVI (1935), 108.

⁹⁷ Lowell, op. cit., p. 3.

The poet as romantic in the present century has been forced by the experiences inherent in his environment to take up technique as the most effective weapon against disorder--the inner and the outer.⁹⁸

Gabriel Pearson has similarly noted that since today's poet labors as the heir to all the ages, he is disinherited of his own age. The ultimate escape from his dilemma may lie ". . . in pushing through the dilemma to an extremity where it ceases to be a liability and becomes something both individual and generic."⁹⁹ Berryman's use of language in this respect may have been made possible because of the general tendency of his generation to avoid the rigid impersonality in poetry advocated by Eliot and his followers. Apart from this objective cult, they were able to write poetry of great skill and intelligence which dealt openly with their experience, even to the edge of chaos and breakdown.¹⁰⁰ Berryman himself has made not of his use of the pressures borne by the individual:

All the way through my work . . . is a tendency to regard the individual soul under stress I am a follower of Pascal in the sense that I don't know what the issue is, or how it is to be resolved--the issue of our common human life, yours, mine, your lady's, everybody's; but I do think that one way in which we can approach it, by the means of art, coming out of

⁹⁸Carol Johnson, Reason's Double Agents, pp. 16-17.

⁹⁹Pearson, op. cit., pp. 114-116.

¹⁰⁰Alfred Alvarez, Beyond-All This Fiddle, p. 41.

Homer and Virgil and down through Yeats and Eliot, is by investigating the individual human soul, or human mind, whichever you prefer.¹⁰¹

There is obviously more to "crafting" than the elements of style, and Berryman's words here state as much. In the body of his poetry, Berryman has revealed through his investigations of the human soul, particularly in Homage and the Dream Songs, a search for some form of human-oriented brotherhood in a world that is nearly always menacingly hostile. "Dream in a dream the heavy soul somewhere/ struck suddenly & dark down to its knees," said Berryman in his 1948 volume of poetry, and that heavy soul ever afterward was involved in a struggle against its environment and itself in order to regain its feet.

From very early in his career, Berryman revealed a vision of man and his environment which remained fairly stable throughout his work. That vision centers around man's tragic condition in an environment is the culture of the Western world in general, and that of America in particular. There is actually ever little, if any, hope of surviving such an environment, most explicitly revealed in Berryman's Dream Songs. As far back as Berryman's Sonnets, however, the same thought, the impotency of hope, is revealed in the form of an historical example in Sonnet 38: "So the old fiction fool us on. Hope steers/ Rather us lickerish

¹⁰¹John Berryman, quoted by Kostelanetz, op. cit., p. 345.

towards some heiroglyph/ Than whelms us home, loinless and sleepy dust" (ll. 12-14). Later, the poet of Homage searches for "hope" in the form of Anne Bradstreet, the "Tenth Muse." And finally Henry House manages to glean a slight degree of hope for survival from the desperate world, not hope of himself through himself, but hope for himself through his "house," in its survival in his daughter.

The various aspects of the two recurrent themes of death and love remain quite stable throughout Berryman's poetry as well. Death, both death in life and actual physical death, plays a dominant role in a large part of Berryman's poetry. The aspect of death in life begins early in his career. The final lines of "The Dispossessed" read: ". . . The race/ is done. Drifts through, between the cold black trunks,/ the peachblow glory of the perishing sun/ in empty houses where old things take place" (ll. 28-31). This portrayal of death in the form of emptiness and valuelessness is dwelt upon throughout Berryman's work. Later, Berryman uses the fact of his father's suicide and his own subsequent rootlessness in much the same manner.

Love, in Berryman's poetry, is usually seen, in its more pure moments, as an element which can defeat the death-dealing hostile world, and which can bring life to the "dispossessed" soul. It is, however, an element which is rarely fully grasped. There is purely physical love and passing infatuation, but rarely is there a lasting love

relationship in Berryman's poetry. In the Sonnets, love dies; in Homage, love between Anne Bradstreet and the poet is an hallucination, or fabrication; in the Dream Songs, Henry suffers from the death of love; but in Love & Fame and Delusions, love of children and of God, the most sustaining and lasting forms of love, prevails.

The general portrait of man presented in the works of Berryman is that of a being hopelessly lost and impotent in the face of a hostile universe. In The Dispossessed, in a poem entitled, "The Spinning Heart," Berryman said:

. . . Your Fears,
 Fidelity and dandelions grown
 As big as elephants, your morning lust
 Can neither name nor control. No time for shame,
 Whippoorwill calling, excrement falling, time
 Rushes like a madman forward. Nothing can be known.
 (ll. 46-51)

Man's situation here is the same as in Henry's world ten years later. It is in the Dream Songs that Berryman makes his view of man most explicit. In the final song, 385, Henry says: "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" (ll. 16-19). Man is seen as being trapped between "things," or physical realities, and the aspirations of his soul, a fate which causes Henry to have to chastise his only hope for a future of any kind, and to desire things to be different than they are.

Into his final volumes Berryman carried the doubts and fears of existence with which he had become increasingly plagued. In his work he had repeatedly attempted to come to poetic terms with the entire modern world as well as himself, both of which he saw as nearly total wrecks. Even so, he never adopted a pessimistic point of view, but maintained rather a tragic one--man has the ability to be great, but is caught between the sky and the sea, being unable to solve the ultimate mysteries of life, creation and death. Often Berryman's tragic outlook found its complement in a sometimes comical view of life,¹⁰² as he enacted his "sense of humor/ fatal to bardic pretention" ("Images of Elspeth," ll. 23-24).

In the final volumes, Berryman, in turning to God, had found cure for all the doubts and fears of existence he had known. The great fear, death, is even assuaged by the belief that it will be God's will--even in a death such as that suffered by Germanicus. At last, after years of torment and trial in a strife-tossed world, unable to find solace anywhere, not in love, not in fame, and only a vague notion of hope and joy in his offspring, Berryman found relief in a view of God, albeit a sometimes brutish as well as merciful God, a view of a God who, beneath or beyond all everyday human endeavor, all earth's inconsistencies, held a steady hand.

¹⁰²William J. Martz, op. cit., p. 5.

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